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"HAPPEN YOU BE SOME OF THE LITTLE FOLKS FROM ABBESS WELL  
[See page 13]

OUR · GREAT  
UNDERTAKING

BY

EVELYN  
EVERETT · GREEN

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## INTRODUCTION

“TELL us a story, Granny, dear !” pleaded the children, crowding into the fire-lit room at dusk.

“A long, long story, Granny, dear, that goes on and on and on—for ever and ever !”

“Like the *Arabian Nights*, Granny ! For a thousand and one nights !”

“I shouldn’t mind if it were ten thousand nights !  
Granny’s stories are so splendid !”

“Well, my dears, I’m afraid you would not, in the limits of a three weeks’ visit, hear much of a story that ran to ten thousand nights of telling !”

“Well, but, Granny, tell us one that will last all the three weeks we have come for—that will be twenty nights after this. You could tell us a lovely tale in twenty nights, couldn’t you now ?”

“Well, my dears, I will see what I can do. You shall come to me at this time to-morrow night, and I will tell you the story of how, when I was a little

## INTRODUCTION

girl, we children, your three great-uncles, my brothers, and my darling little sister, who never lived to grow old, undertook what seemed to many people at the outset a labour of Hercules, and how we learned from it a number of lessons which have lasted us through life."

"O Granny, that sounds awfully interesting ! only don't let it have too much moral ! "

The Grandmother smiled as the happy children trooped off to bed ; and that night she read for long in the pages of a faded diary written in a large, round child's hand.

## CHAPTER I

### THE HOME OF THE AUNTS

WHEN I was a little girl of about twelve years old a great sorrow fell upon our home.

Our dear father was taken very ill, and for a long while lay between life and death. And when, by-and-bye, we children heard that his life was no longer in danger, we were still quite well aware that the shadow over our lives had not lifted altogether.

Now, when I was a little girl, children did not run about their houses very much as they pleased, bursting in upon their elders, and asking all sorts of questions of them, whether encouraged to do so or not.

We were kept to our nursery and school-room, except at specified hours, when we went down to meals, nicely washed and brushed, or took our

walks in the streets or in the park, or were turned out to play in our garden, which was our chiefest pleasure of all. At least it was mine ; but I think the elder boys preferred the greater liberty of the park.

There were five of us ; and I was in the middle. Gordon and Roger were older, and Cubbie and Dimples were younger. Cubbie's real name was Cuthbert, but we seldom called him so. As for little Drusilla, we had all sorts of names for her, the darling ! But perhaps Dimples was the favourite ; it seemed to suit her so. She was all dimples and sweetness and laughter. She was taken into father's room sometimes when he lay ill, when none of the rest of us were allowed in. But it was to me that mother first told what was going to happen, when father, though no longer in peril of death, did not seem to be getting any better.

" My dear little daughter," she said, " we shall have to let this house and go away. Dear Papa has lost the post he held, as the doctors say he will never be strong enough for such hard work again. But why we must go away quickly is that there has to be an operation. I must take father into a sort of hospital—not exactly a hospital—but a place where he can be better looked after

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than he could at home. I shall live close by ; and there are people coming to live here in our house ; and you will all have to go away."

" Yes, Mamma, dear," I said, for I knew I must try not to cry, though I wanted to terribly, for it was dreadful to think of leaving mother—with dear Papa so ill, and the very sound of that dreadful word "operation" made my heart sink. " And where are we going ? "

" To my kind old aunts that I have told you so much about, who live in the pretty, old-fashioned house in the picture you like to look at in the drawing-room."

At that things began to brighten up a little. We had all heard tales of Aunt Susanna and Aunt Isabel, and I had always wanted to see them. I was called Mary Isabel after mother's aunt. Sometimes I had played games with Cubbie and Dimples of going to see them ; but so far as I knew, we had none of us ever been invited before.

" O Mamma, dear, that will be rather interesting ! "

Mother smiled as she saw my brightening face. In those days children always called their parents Papa and Mamma. Anything else was considered rather a liberty.

" It is very kind of them to take you all. I

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know you will be happier for being together. It is a great relief to me. Nurse will go with you to take care of your clothes, and see after you as far as she can. But you know, Mary, dear, the boys have got rather beyond Nurse. And I am very anxious that they shall not give trouble. Gordon's high spirits run away with him so often; and Roger can be very stubborn, though one can depend on him famously too. But it is to you I look, Mary, dear, to try and keep them in bounds. You are very good at devising amusement and entertainment for them; and I want them to understand how very kind it is of the aunts to open their quiet house to such an inroad of young barbarians!" And then mother smiled at me, and I smiled back and choked down the lump rising in my throat.

"And when are we going, Mamma, dear?"

"Next week, my love; on Tuesday."

And to-day was Friday. "It was quick work!"

"And for how long will it be, Mamma?"

"That, darling, is quite uncertain. This house is let for six months; possibly we may never come back to it to live. It is possible we may have to live in the country after this; but that we cannot tell yet. It will certainly be two months before Papa will be able to take any journey. All

## THE HOME OF THE AUNTS II

August and September you will be with the aunts at Abbess Well. Beyond that we cannot look at present," and as Mamma spoke those words, I saw her eyes fill with tears, and I was quite sure then that she did not feel really certain that dear Papa would ever get quite well again.

I stole my arms about her neck, and she held me very tightly to her.

"We must pray to God very, very hard, my darling. Let the little ones always remember him in their prayers. I want all my children to pray for their father and mother——"

"We do, Mamma—we do—always!"

"I know it, love. It has helped us to know it. God hears all prayer; but it is the prayer of faith that prevails. A child's faith is so strong—pray always in faith——"

Mother was called away at that moment; the following days were too full of bustle and excitement for there to be many moments for quiet talk. The boys were just released from school. They were wild with excitement at the thought of two months spent in the country. Regent's Park had been our "country" hitherto. People did not flock away from town in my youth quite as they do now. Papa and Mamma went away for a little time

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generally; but the Park and Primrose Hill and now and again a day at Richmond or Bushey Park or the Crystal Palace was as much as generally fell to our share.

The days seemed to pass slowly, and yet to gallop. But the time came at length when the train rushed us along the sunny spaces of country, growing more rural and more strange with every mile; till we felt ourselves really and truly in a new world, and wondered what we should feel like at our journey's end.

The boys were not a bit frightened. That was rather a comfort; because I was, though I did not want any of them to know it. I could not imagine what it would be like to live in another house, right away from father and mother. It was nice having old Nurse with us. She was always kind, and seemed a necessary part of our lives. But for the rest everything would be "strange and new." And suppose the old aunts were not to like us! I had an idea that Aunt Susanna was a rather formidable person. Mamma had certainly been afraid of her in her childhood. There was a picture of her—at least a sort of picture—in the dining-room—a black silhouette profile in a little black frame. It hung just where I could see it when I

knelt at prayers. I knew the face by heart. The sharp nose and chin slightly inclined towards one another, the high upright line of the brow, rather overhanging the eye-sockets, and the crown of the big mob-cap. I seemed to see it before me as the train sped on and on upon its way.

It was rather a long journey, because we had to change out of the fast train by-and-bye and get into a much slower one, which stopped at every station, and went through ever such a lot of little tunnels amongst high hills—I thought them huge mountains—amongst which the train ran in and out. I wondered if there would be any snow mountains amongst them, till I remembered that the geography book said that England did not have any. But some of the steep sides of the hills were very white, and when the sun shone on them they sparkled and glittered. It was rather wild and very beautiful. And it made me remember the stories that mamma used to tell us over the fire on winter's nights, about the fells and moorlands she remembered when she was a little girl, and the snowdrifts in the winter that used to bury the poor sheep, and sometimes the shepherds too.

There was a story Dimples loved to hear about a little lamb that had been brought in half frozen,

and how it had been laid by the fire, and had come to life again, and fed with warm milk, till it grew so tame it would follow people about like a dog, and used to take walks with Mamma all over the place. Dimples had already asked whether the lamb would be there still ; for it was at Abbess Well that this had happened when mother was a little girl.

It was getting dark when we got there. It had been a long drive from the station. Dimples was fast asleep on Nurse's knee. The two big boys had crowded on to the box seat with the coachman; and they seemed to be talking all the time. Cubbie kneeled up to look out better at the solemn dark hills which seemed to shut us in as we drove ; but the sky above was not dark a bit ; it was the loveliest blue and pink, so that it made you want to climb up and up the rugged hillsides to look at it.

Then there were dear little thatched houses down below, with lights twinkling from their windows ; and always the noise of water everywhere, sometimes foaming and roaring, sometimes just tinkling and laughing. Cubbie tried to count all the little stone bridges we passed over, but he lost count before we arrived. It was growing dark too, though the carriage lamps were not lighted. There was a moon shining down as the sky grew darker. Suddenly

we got to a place where a great wood seemed to shut us in, but there was a little lodge beside a pair of gates, and the gates stood open, and the carriage turned in at them. Then almost directly we had got to the house, and we were in a queer, dim, panelled hall, and two old ladies in white caps—one rather tall and the other very small—were kissing us and talking to Nurse about the journey.

Then we were taken up some wide, shallow stairs, that felt very slippery, for they had not any carpet on them, down a long slippery passage, through a swing door, and into a funny low room, with oak beams all across the ceiling, where a table was set with great plates of bread and butter and a big cake and bowls of milk ; and we were so hungry that we wanted no second invitation, but sat down there and then, and began to eat, whilst one of the old ladies hovered about us, seeing that we had everything we wanted, and the other sat very upright in a chair at the head of the table looking at us, but not speaking often ; and I had only to look at her face to be very certain that this was Aunt Susanna, whom mamma had told us we must be sure to obey without questioning and without any grumbling.

It came as a surprise to me that Aunt Susanna

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should be so very small. I had always fancied her tall and commanding ; but she was not nearly so tall as gentle Aunt Isabel, who seemed to flutter about like a softly feathered bird, and made little tender cooing noises over us, though I thought she seemed just a little bit afraid of the boys.

To be sure the boys were very silent. They ate everything put before them ; but they scarcely spoke a word. Everything seemed so very strange ; the dim light of the candles, the long, low room, with its wainscotted walls and deep recesses, the uncurtained windows with their lattice panes—even the sweet-scented air which stole in through one open casement. Above all, the perfect silence—that was the strangest of all. We had never noticed the hum of the street, which never really ceased till long, long after we were fast asleep, and had begun again long before we woke. But now that there was none of this background of sound to our own voices we were half afraid to use them.

"The children are tired," spoke Aunt Susanna in her clear, decided tones, "they had better go to bed at once. In the morning we can hear all they have to tell us."

So to bed we all went. We had the duckiest little rooms all close together. Nurse called our

part of the house a "rabbit warren ;" but if she was right, rabbits must have very nice homes. There were doors leading from room to room, and generally a little step up or down ; and there was a little corkscrew staircase at the end of the passage which led down to a garden door. But that we did not find out till next day. That night when Nurse opened our window after we were in bed—for there was room in my bed for darling Dimples, and I loved to feel her beside me—the sound of tinkling water came in like music, and the rustle of trees, which seemed as though they were talking, talking all night long in a soft whisper. It took off the edge of the deep silence, and made me drowsy very soon, so that, though I had thought I should be a long time going to sleep, I think I was soon as fast asleep as Dimples, and dreaming the queerest dreams which went on all night, till the sun awoke me in the morning by shining right in at the open window.

I heard the boys stirring about, running backwards and forwards to each other's rooms, and scampering up and down the passages shouting items of news to one another.

"That was a rat ! Did you see him—whisking along that bit of roof ! "

"I say, look at those rabbits out in the wood—  
hundreds of them—thousands—millions, I daresay !  
See their white scuts ? O if we had a gun ! "

" You couldn't shoot them if you had ! You  
don't know how."

" But we brought our bows and arrows ! "

" Bosh ! Do you think you'd hit with them ? "

" We might, if we practised ! I say, I wonder  
where that path leads to up the hill ! I say, Polly,  
are you awake yet ? "

" I'm getting up. O boys, isn't it splendid ?  
Did you ever taste anything like the air ? "

" Air ! Bosh ! Who cares for air. I say, Cubbie,  
have you got the cricket things in your room ? "

" Yes ! " after a pause, " all the lot of them. I  
wonder if they'll have a field for us to play in ! "

" Rather ! And if they haven't we'll find a  
place right enough. I saw a jolly lot of bits of  
green along the roadside as we came along. We'll  
make a pitch somewhere, never fear ! We're going  
to have a thundering good time, you see if we  
ain't ? "

We had breakfast in the same room where we  
had had tea—bread and milk and porridge, with  
bread and honey afterwards. But no tea or coffee.  
Then a message came that it was prayer-time, and

we were all sent down the little corkscrew staircase and it was then we saw the garden door which was to be our own special way of exit from our quarters. But now we were taken down a long passage and into the hall. Aunt Susanna sat at a table in the middle, with the big Bible before her. Aunt Isabel was in a high-backed chair by the empty fireplace. Near to her a bench had been set, and we trooped towards it at her signal and sat down in a row. Some servants came in at another door and took another bench, and then Aunt Susanna read prayers. And I remember that she prayed for a sick person dear to many, who was passing through deep waters ; and I was certain that she meant our dear father, and that made me love Aunt Susanna, in spite of her bright, keen eyes and rather stern way of speaking ; for I was sure that she was praying to God for all of us, though she only mentioned one.

After prayers the boys and Dimples were sent out into the garden to play ; but I was kept, and went into the breakfast room with the aunts, to answer some questions, and to be told some few rules which we were all to keep.

The rules were not many ; but I felt that they must be obeyed ; and I thought the boys would feel the same. We were not to romp about the

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house, except in our own quarters; not to use the front staircase at all; to come down to the dining-room for the mid-day dinner, but not for other meals; and to do our playing out of doors in the shrubberies and the woods and rough ground round the house, but not in the flower-garden, which we were only to enter by special permission.

Then Aunt Isabel kissed me, and hoped we should be very happy and good, and I promised I would try; and ran away to join the others, hoping that we should none of us do anything to grieve kind Aunt Isabel, or to make Aunt Susanna angry with us.

## CHAPTER II

### FIRST DAYS

I COULD tell you a great deal about those first days at Abbess Well ; but I must not make this part of my tale too long, or there may not be room for the story of our Great Undertaking, which began somewhat later.

But I must tell a few things that happened, because they seem to belong to the tale, and will make things clearer as I go on.

Just at first we thought that our Aunts must be very rich, and that they had an immense estate all round their funny old house. But as we got to know it better, it did not seem quite so large ; and now that I have grown old and can look back at things, I can very well see how difficult it must have been for them, on their small income, to keep things as nice about them as they did. For their land was quite unproductive, all wild, quartz-strewn,

rocky soil, where only firs and larches could thrive ; and even the crops in their big kitchen garden needed soil made for them before they could flourish as they should. Some few kinds of fruit did well there. We watched with extreme interest the slow ripening of the apples on a certain tree, which had been given to us for our share of garden spoil. We were forbidden to take flowers or fruit unless the aunts were with us to give permission ; but this tree of ribstone pippins (I can recall their flavour now) was really our own and whatever fruit it bore that autumn was to be our property, to do what we liked with.

I had a bit of garden border given to me. It was rather wild and tangled and full of weeds ; but when I had carefully pulled these up, and Aunt Isabel had showed me how to tie up the tall tangled flowers to sticks, so that they did not lop and tumble all about, and get tangled up together, I soon began to get quite proud of my garden. It had a rose bush in it which was coming into bloom for the second time. I got a little box and sent two of its loveliest half-blown buds to Papa in the hospital-place where he was ; and Mamma wrote to tell me how pleased he had been.

Sometimes, when it had rained, I begged little

plants from the old gardener, and put them into my border. They did not always grow. He used always to tell me it wasn't the "roight toim" for moving things. But some of them lived, especially those that I put in shady corners; and as for one of my sunflowers you never saw anything so huge! It was as big as a soup plate; and when we wanted to dress up Dimples as a fairy one day, we cut a big sunflower and it made her the funniest hat! She looked a perfect darling in it! I wanted her to wear it next day at church, tied under her chin with a yellow riband; but Aunt Isabel said that Aunt Susanna would not like it; so we had to give that up.

There was a meadow where the two cows lived; but the boys were not allowed to play cricket there. Aunt Susanna said that they might frighten or hurt the cows with their balls; and I think perhaps they would have done; for the cows were very curious about us whenever we went to see them, and came round us to stare as long as we stayed. And I'm sure if the boys had played cricket, they would have wanted to know all about it, and most likely they would have got hit by the bats or the balls.

But Gordon and Roger were rather cross about it.

"I call it a beastly shame!"

"Old women are such rotten fools!"

"O Roger, Mamma wouldn't like you to talk like that. I'm sure Aunt Susanna and Aunt Isabel are very kind!"

"O, kind enough—for girls." Roger was more argumentative than Gordon, and Gordon's flashes of wrath were sooner over. "But you can't expect them to know what fellows feel about things. As though we'd hurt their precious old cows!"

"Well, come along," cried Gordon, "we'll go and find a place for ourselves, if we can't have this blessed old field. We won't be done! No fear! I saw lots of places as we came along. We'll go and find one that will make a good pitch, see if we don't!"

This was the fourth day of our visit, and it was a Saturday. Till now we had not been out on the roads at all. There was so much to see in the gardens, and in those woody places which climbed the hill behind the house, and led up and up into the wild region of moor, strewn about with quartz and spar, though we thought it was crystal and perhaps even gold. We were dreaming dreams of growing rich by the treasures that we found; and I knew that just now money was scarce at home, and that

Papa's illness was costing more than the family budget could well afford to bear. I could not have explained this in such words as these then ; but it did seem to me a very desirable thing if we could find any treasures on the hillside which might be converted into money.

However, to-day we were bent on something different. The boys thought that half the fun of coming into the country was to get some cricket. In the Park they had not been allowed to play, because only quite common street boys played there, and mamma would not let the boys join with them. But here it would be different, we thought. And we could have a cricket ground all to ourselves too, where nobody would interfere with us. I had learnt how to bowl to the boys pretty well "for a girl ;" and sometimes I made a tolerable little score with a bat ; but that was mostly if Cubbie bowled to me. Anyway, I was just as eager as the boys to find a place where we could practise ; and also it was rather interesting to see where the road led to after it had passed the gates of Abbess Well.

"We won't go the road we came by," Gordon declared, when we stood outside and looked this way and that. "We saw what there was that way ;

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not half bad sort of places ; but I'd like to see what it's like farther on. I expect there's a village that way. We ought to see what it's like. Mamma said it was a tiny little wee place ; but it must have some houses and shops, I suppose. Anyway, we'll go and see ; and perhaps we'll find a goose-green or something, where we can play ! ”

“ Let's go—let's go—and see the gooses ! ” cried Dimples, jumping up and down as she clung to my hand ; her other hand grasped the collar of the old bob-tailed sheep-dog who came everywhere with us. Aunt Isabel said he could always find his way home if ever we lost ourselves, and it was quite true. You had only to say to him, “ Go home, Bob, go home ! ” and he would put up his nose into the air, just give a sniff, and then turn and trot straight for home, whether there was any path or not. Only, if it was very hard for us to follow him, he would go round to show us a better way. But for himself he always made what old Moses the gardener called “ a bee line.” We all loved old Bob by this time, and Dimples loved him best of all, and he took care of her just as well as Nurse could, perhaps better ; for Bob wasn't afraid of cows or rats or anything, and Nurse was, rather, as we began to find out. So that I think Dimples

felt safest with Bob, who growled at anything which seemed to frighten her.

Bob was quite pleased to see us turn towards the village. He had doggie friends of his own there, we came to know; and one enemy, the black-smith's bull-terrier, with whom he had waged furious war for a long while. The tear in Bob's ear which had never mended had come in one of those battles. Now they did not fight; they only eyed each other with suspicion, and growled and whined a little when they met. We learned all these interesting things bit by bit as we came to know the village. To-day we only saw that Bob was pleased to go there, and trotted on ahead very contentedly.

It was a pretty road from Abbess Well along a lane quite arched over by trees. And by-and-bye, as you looked along, you saw sunshine through the arch of greenery; and the boys gave a whoop, and made a rush towards the open, whilst I ran after them, holding Dimples by the hand.

"O how pretty!" we both cried, as we came out into the open sunny space.

"Gooses! Gooses! Gooses!" cried Dimples, clapping her little hands joyously, "and ducks—O, and little baby ducks too! O Polly, look! look! they won't be drownded, will they? O look,

they're going into the pond ! O Polly ! Will they drown themselves ? O look, one's got his head under the water ! O, why doesn't his mamma help him ? ”

We had seen big ducks often in the Park, and had fed them too ; but baby ducks had never come our way. The big pond we saw before us lay at our end of a big, open village green, and one arm of it ran almost up to the road by which we had come. It was here the little ducks, with their father and mother to guard them, were splashing about and amusing themselves. Farther on a lot of geese waddled about pecking at the grass, and only taking to the water, with much hissing and stretching of long necks, when Bob ran barking round them and herded them all in, making believe, perhaps, that they were a flock of sheep.

Dimples held fast to my hand as she watched.

“ O Polly, Polly, what a funny noise they make. I don't fink the gooses are quite as nice as the ducks ! ”

Already the boys were off ; for at the other side of the green, nearer to the cluster of buildings which was formed by the church, the school-houses and the Rectory, some boys were playing cricket ; whilst a good many others lounged about watching

them, or playing games of their own. It was a very nice place they had chosen for their pitch, for there was a big group of trees not far away, where you could sit in the shade to watch ; and beyond the trees was a blacksmith's forge, and two big cart-horses were being shod outside, and when you got nearer, you saw the red glow of the fire and all the sparks rushing up into the darkness of the roof.

Beyond the forge were two or three funny little village shops. We scarcely knew that they were meant for shops at first ; but we came to know them quite well. In more than one of them you could see rows of bottles holding sweets, such funny sweets ; but when Aunt Isabel bought us penny-worths from them we thought them delicious. I can still remember the smell of the grocer's shop, where bacon and hams hung in a huge chimney, and balls of string and brushes and pans of all sorts from rafters overhead, and cheese and butter and biscuits were ranged on shelves, with boot laces, articles of attire and a medley of implements and food stuffs of which we never thoroughly learned the names or uses.

But to-day it was not the shops, nor even the forge that absorbed us, nor the irregular row of

little thatched cottages which meandered round the green. It was the boys and the cricket which drew our eyes, and we stood beneath the trees to watch them as they played and shouted and knocked about a very bad ball with very odd-looking bats.

There was one big lad who was in, and he seemed to be lording it over all the others with the air of a youthful monarch. He did not play at all badly really ; but he would never admit that he was out even when he was, and *would* stop in by his wicket, which we thought very unfair.

At last a sharp-looking little boy in corduroy breeches, and with no jacket, and only a bit of string for his braces, bowled a beautiful ball that clean knocked down the middle stump. Gordon and Roger both shouted, " Well done, young 'un ! " But the big boy at the wicket yelled, " No ball ! " at the top of his voice, just as though he were umpire, and stood with his bat all ready to go on. Gordon really couldn't stand that. He bounded forward and squared up to the big bully.

" I say, that ain't fair, you coxy chap ! You were out as clean as a whistle ! Out you go, I say ! Cricket's cricket—"

" And pray who be you, a-layin' down of the law to we ? " shouted the big boy, his face as red as

a peony. "Do you want to fight?" And he squared his fists and began to dance about, making all sorts of hideous faces.

"Fight! I'll fight the whole lot of you if you want!" cried Gordon, flinging off his jacket. "I'll begin with you, Coxy, and give it you hot. Cheat!"

A change came over the aspect of the village bully as he saw Gordon rolling up his sleeves, and noted perhaps the muscles of his arms, and his look of eagerness and understanding. I was frightened—not because I thought Gordon would be beaten, but because I did not know what Aunt Susanna would say if she heard he had been fighting with village boys.

"I say—how d'yer know my name?" spoke the big boy, standing with his arms akimbo and deigning now to parley.

"I don't know your confounded name and I don't want to either!" cried Gordon. "I know you're too coxy by half, and want taking down a peg!"

"He's Ben Cocksedge—he's blacksmith's son!" piped a small voice from the ring of onlookers. "We calls he Cocky 'cause he's like a cock on a dunghill he is!"

Cocky flung round, and there was a scattering of

the small fry, who darted hither and thither in all directions. At the same moment a big, burly man, with a great hammer in his hand, stepped towards the little group on the green.

" You give 'un a taste of his own medicine, little measter," spoke the grinning smith. "'Twill do he a power of good. Coxy! ay, that he be; and he wants more of a lathering than I've given him yet. You go for 'un. I'll see fair play, I will. Pitch into un! Take the nonsense out of he! I guess you could do it too!"

But Cocky did not seem to care about this. His father's intervention seemed to take the cheek out of him.

" I don't want to fight he!" he said. " Only he's no right calling names; and sayin' as I cheated!"

" You did cheat!" cried Gordon and Roger in a breath, and then Gordon added, " Tell you what; I'll bowl to you till I get you out, and then you shall bowl to me. And if you don't play fair I'll fight you! See if I don't!"

Whilst the preliminaries of this truce were being settled, Cubbie came up to us under the trees, and with him was an odd-looking, tattered boy, with very bright dark eyes, and a face that was pleasant

when it smiled and very evil-looking when it wore a scowl, and it looked as though the scowl were more frequently there than the smile.

"Polly," spoke Cubbie eagerly, "this is Tim, the tinker's son. He says he can play cricket better than any of them; but they won't let him. Isn't it stupid of them?"

"Why won't they let you, Tim?"

"They calls I a hang-gallus—that's cause they hanged my feyther's feyther for sheep-stealing. But I haven't done nothin', no, nor feyther neither! But they be too proud to play with I. Happen they knows I'd whop un!"

"I'll play with you!" cried Cubbie, who was the most sociable little chap in the world, and made friends everywhere. "Tell me where you live, Tim. I'll come!"

Tim pointed vaguely towards the far end of the green, and said something about the "common, where all the fuzzy grew, and a hut, and a quarry," but we did not make much out of his description, and he seemed rather shy of Cubbie's advances, and mumbled something about "the quality" which we did not understand; and whilst we were watching Gordon bowling lobs to Cocky, and soon getting him out, and then watching Cocky bowl

to Gordon, who piled up an immense score, whilst the blacksmith stood by applauding and shouting, Tim slunk away, and when we looked round for him he was gone.

"Never mind," quoth Cubbie, "I'll find him when I want him. He's got a donkey and he sells wood and fir-cones and things to the cottage women. I'll find him any time I want."

By the time the boys were ready to go, they were the idols of the village green, and had promised to come again and teach the rustics a different sort of cricket from the one they had practised amongst themselves. Even Cocky had fallen beneath the sway of the "young gentleman from Lunnon." He might wish to regain his supremacy later, but for the moment he had doffed his crown.

Some little girls, who had crept shyly towards us, had told Dimples and me quite a good many interesting things about the village and the people who lived in it. So that next morning, when we were dressed in our best, and marched in a row into the funny square pew where we sat in church, it was quite exciting to watch the people coming in, and to guess who were those whose names we had heard.

Of course we knew the burly smith and Cocky,

who gave us a sheepish sort of grin when he looked our way. I was sure I knew the miller, by the rather dusty look on his face, and I picked out several of the children we had talked with on the green. But no Tim was there. He did not look as though he had any clothes fit to come to church in ; and perhaps he would not have been allowed in either ; though what was meant by the mysterious phrase "hang-gallus" was more than I knew.

But there was no mistaking when Squire Rowntree came in. His step seemed quite to echo through the church as he passed up the aisle, looking sharply about him the while, as though to make sure that all who ought to be in their places at church had arrived.

I had heard of Squire Rowntree from Nurse and the servants at Abbess Well. We fancied that people were a little afraid of him. He was a "neighbour," Aunt Isabel had told us, and a "very distant connection—scarcely a relation." But she did not seem to know whether he would take any notice of us. He had the big pew opposite to ours, and he sat in it all alone. When he had put his face down for a few moments as though looking for something in his hat, he raised it with a jerk, and stared across at us all out of a pair of

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very blue eyes set deep under very bushy brows. Then he took snuff—which we had never seen anybody do before, and Cubbie laughed—laughed almost out loud. That and Aunt Susanna's look at him made me feel so hot all over, that I was afraid to look about me any more; and that is all I remember now of that first Sunday at Abbess Well.

## CHAPTER III

WANTED—THIRTY POUNDS

FOR three whole weeks we were uncloudedly happy at Abbess Well. We were allowed to do very much as we liked so long as we did not get into mischief. And there was so much to see and to do every day, that there was no temptation to transgress. The boys had got leave to play cricket on the green. The Rector had been called in by Aunt Susanna, to see what he thought about it. He was a kind man, and had come and talked with us in the garden, and asked the boys a lot of questions about their school and their games and the things they liked best to do. Then he had gone back to the house, and that evening Aunt Isabel came and told us that we might play on the green with the village boys unless they began to get too noisy or rude. But there was to be no fighting—this

she said several times over, very firmly ; and she looked hard at Gordon as she spoke, and he got rather red, and muttered something which I did not quite hear, nor Aunt Isabel either, I think.

By this time we had somehow come to understand that nothing which we did in this place was hidden long from Aunt Susanna. How she came to know so much we could not tell. Dimples made an awestruck suggestion.

"Mamma says that God sees us wherever we are, and knows everyfing we do ; perhaps He tells Aunt Susanna ! "

However, though the aunts plainly knew everything, they did not interfere much with us, and they were very kind in their own way. Sometimes I felt as though they were sorry for us, and rather sorrowful themselves. More than once, when I had stolen into their long panelled parlour, where they sat together almost all day, and which always smelt of rose-leaves and lavender and aromatic herbs, which they sifted and prepared for the village people as medicine, I had heard them talking together very gravely ; but they always stopped directly I came in, and Aunt Isabel would draw me towards her and kiss me in a very tender fashion. And somehow I began to be afraid that things were

not going quite well about Papa, although Mamma's letters were cheerful still, and spoke of his getting slowly better, though his strength was a long time in coming back.

Then came a night when I could not sleep, and as I heard voices in the play-room, where we had our meals, I thought I would go and see who was there ; and perhaps ask if I might sit there a little while and read, to see if that would make me sleepy.

As I got to the door I heard Nurse saying,

“ ‘Tis a matter of thirty pounds, they say ; and though that’s not so much to some folks, it’s difficult enough to raise it after all the expenses as they have been put to already ; and the master not able to do his work for so long, and five children to clothe and feed and educate.”

“ And it’s little margin there is here, I take it,” spoke another voice—that was Cookie from the kitchen, who was a great friend of ours by this time. “ The mistresses have their work cut out, I know, to make ends meet as it is. And with five extra mouths to fill—six counting yours, Nurse—all these weeks, they won’t be able to do more. It do seem a pity, that it do, if it might bring the poor gentleman round again ; but there, there—we can’t do more than we can ! ”

Now I knew quite well that Nurse and Cookie were talking about Papa and Mamma ; but I did not go into the room to get a book. I did not feel I wanted to read now. I crept back to bed, and lay staring at the moonlight shining through the leaves of the tree outside, and the rustling whisper it made seemed to form itself into words.

"Thirty pounds—thirty pounds—thirty pounds!"

Then I began trying to think how much thirty pounds could really be. Sixpence was the largest coin I had ever owned, save once or twice on a birthday. There were forty sixpences in a pound, I knew ; and thirty times forty made a total which fairly took my breath away. More than a thousand sixpences ! Why who but a crowned head could hope to possess so much wealth at one time ? And thirty pounds was wanted to make our father strong and well again. So at least I had understood from this fragment of talk. Thirty pounds over and above what had to be paid for the things going on now.

I lay and pondered and pondered about it all, wondering how money was made, and whether by any strenuous efforts we could contrive to raise a portion of that sum. I had one beautiful doll, which I let Dimples play with on special occasions,

having somewhat outgrown her charms myself. I had heard Nurse say with pride, exhibiting her clothing, that it must have cost a lot of money to rig her out like that. The boys had their cricket bats ; but it would be hard to part from them ; and they were not new, and one had been spliced. Our silver christening mugs were in the bank now, and I was not quite sure if they exactly belonged to us. Dimples had a coral necklace and I had a little silver watch which did not keep very good time, but had a very sweet face. I wondered how much I should get for it if I sold it.

Then there was our apple tree ! The apples would get ripe some day. I tried to remember how many apples you got for sixpence at the greengrocer's shop in London, and to calculate what our tree would bring us in. And this was such a soporific process that I fell fast asleep before I had reached any conclusion ; and when I woke up in the morning, I was not certain whether or not it was all a dream.

But that afternoon I had the chance to have a nice talk with Nurse. Aunt Isabel had found a sheet badly torn, and I had offered to mend it with Nurse's help. To my great joy Aunt Isabel had said she would give me sixpence when I had finished it nicely. Mamma had been very particular

about my needlework at home, and I really could darn very nicely.

So I sent Dimples out with Cubbie, to fish in the pond, which they loved to do. Gordon and Roger went off to play cricket on the Green, with Tinker Tim's boy to bowl for them if nobody else turned up—for Gordon worked his team rather hard, and was much more enthusiastic than his following of village boys. And I settled myself in the window seat of our play-room with Nurse, and we set to our task with hearty good-will, determined to make a good job of it.

And then I asked Nurse about that thirty pounds, whether I had dreamt about it, or whether she had really been talking to Cookie after we went to bed.

"Yes, Miss Polly, Cook was here with me last night sure enough; and if you heard us talk, you may be sure you only heard the truth."

"But I want to understand, Nurse! What does Mamma want the thirty pounds for? Can't Papa get well without it? I thought he was going to get quite well in the home where he is staying now."

"Well, my dear, we hope he will, in a manner of speaking. But it's like this, you see. He won't be fit to come out before the middle of October, they say; and that is longer than was thought

at first ; because he does not get on as fast as he should. And what the doctors are saying now is that November is a bad month for him to spend in England, and that it would do him a deal of good to send him off on a bit of a sea-voyage, where he could get some weeks of sunshine and sea winds."

"O Nurse ! and is it that that costs thirty pounds ? "

" Yes, Miss Polly ; the mistress writes that some kind friend has offered him a way of getting a capital trip from the end of October till hard upon Christmas, in some ship that goes into sunny seas, where he would be comfortable and sort of cared for too. But he would have to pay thirty pounds for the trip. And they do not see just how to get the money. This long illness has made such a lot of expenses. Indeed, if your kind aunts had not taken you in here, I don't know how things would have been managed\*as it\*is."

You see, old Nurse had been with mother almost ever since she was a girl, so she was more like a friend to us than a servant, and we all loved her dearly.

" Would Mamma go with him ? "

" That I don't rightly know ; but I scarcely think so. You see, they do not think they will

be able to manage it anyhow. And yet it seems a pity . . . ”

Nurse went off pondering herself, and our needles flew fast with little clicks.

“ Is thirty pounds a very big, immense lot of money, Nursie ? ” I asked.

“ Just depends, Miss Polly, my dear, who the folks are we’re talking of. Now I once had the best part of thirty pounds laid by in the bank ; but I lent it to a brother of mine to put in his business, and he lost it all for me ; and I’ve had to help his poor widow ever since—he going silly with the trouble of things, and dying right off. I’ve never been able to save much since. If I had——”

There was another pause, and I knew well that dear old Nurse would have offered her savings to Mamma had she had them still. I could have hugged her for it ; but I was not sure that she would quite like it, and she began to speak again—

“ Of course, there’s folks as think no more of thirty pounds than we do of thirty pence ; but they’re not the kind of folks we know ; and if we did, the master could not take money from strangers, perhaps not even\* from friends. ’Tis hard for the gentry like that. Sometimes there be those as would be pleased to help them, if they knew things ;

but they would not know how to offer, nor the others how to take."

I sat thinking, and thinking, and thinking, whilst the needles clicked and clicked.

"How does money come, Nurse? How did you get yours, that your brother lost?"

"Why, I worked for it, Miss Polly. I saved it out of my wages. All money comes at the first by working, unless so be as you have land and funded property as they call it. It's because your Papa has not been able to work all these months, that the pinch comes upon you all now."

"Yes, I know; Mamma said something like that. You mean that if people work they can earn money."

"If there's a market for such work as they can do," answered Nurse sagely.

I was not quite sure what this saying meant, but I turned it over and over in my mind. Work! work brought money, if there was a market. Now, since we had been at Abbess Well we had heard more talk about markets than ever in our lives before. There was "market-day" when so many carts passed. The nearest town was called Market Abbot, as the village was called Crickle Abbot, and the next one Crickle Ford. It seemed to me that the market would be there all right; but for

the work, what sort of work was it that found a market? That was the puzzle; and I was not sure whether Nurse could tell me what I wanted to know, nor was I able quite to frame any question. But I sat thinking and puzzling as I darned. There were five of us! The boys were very strong. I was strong too, and was always called a "handy" child. Was there no work that we could do amongst us for this market? To be sure I was earning sixpence this very afternoon. But even if I earned sixpence two or three times a week, which was very doubtful, what a little way it would go towards that thousand sixpences wanted! And the money was needed rather soon too, in the middle of October, and now it was August. That was two months, twice thirty was sixty, in sixty days the money would be wanted! O dear! O dear! the more I puzzled the farther off that thirty pounds looked!

We were interrupted by a message to say that I was to go to the panelled parlour to drink tea with my aunts. I knew that this was meant as a treat for me. They always had some tea brought to them at half-past four. This was not because they were beginning to fall into the fashion of the "kettle-drum tea," which indeed had scarcely yet begun, but it was a fashion they had started for

themselves, and I knew that kind Aunt Isabel had thought it would be a nice treat for me, and a break in my afternoon of sewing.

So Nurse brushed my hair and washed my hands and face and put me into a clean pinafore ; and I went down to the panelled parlour slowly ; and the doors being open, for it was a hot summer's day, I heard a big booming voice issuing forth, and even the words the voice was saying—

“I tell you, madam, that good work is more and more difficult to get with every generation that passes. What's good enough for the fathers isn't good enough for the sons. They drift away to the towns ; and things are going to get worse and worse that way. All this talk about education ; well, I hope it's more talk than anything besides, the way they'll work it, if all we hear is going to come about ! The three R's and the catechism, that's enough for ~~village~~ urchins, and I hope I'll not live to see the day when we have a lot more than that crammed down their throats ! Book learning is all very well in its way ; but——”

I slipped into the room and took a stool at Aunt Isabel's feet. It was Squire Rowntree who was talking ; and he gave me a curt nod when Aunt Susanna said—

"This is poor Susy's eldest girl, Squire; I was telling you about them all."

The Squire nodded again, but he did not speak to me directly. He went on talking to the aunts; and I sat and listened, partly because his big booming voice, his heavy eyebrows, and bright, steely eyes fascinated me, partly because I was keenly interested in what he was saying, although I could not understand the half.

But what I did glean was this—that he found some trouble in getting men who would work in the way he wanted them to. They seemed to him to be troublesome and careless. He spoke of things he would like to have done in his garden, but which he could not trust his present staff to do. I think one of his gardeners had emigrated with all his family, and another old one had died. He had not found anybody to take the vacant places that satisfied him in the least. He talked on in this fashion for some time, and then suddenly got up to go. He had a queer, abrupt manner of acting and speaking. He did just hold out his hand to me before he left, and said—

"You'd better come and see me one of these days, little girl, and see if you and your brothers can find some plums on my garden walls!"

Then when he was gone Aunt Isabel said to Aunt Susanna—

“ Poor dear Squire Rowntree always thinks the world is turning topsy-turvy. I do not see that things are really so very bad ; do you ? ”

“ I fear the standard of honest toil gradually becomes lowered,” Aunt Susanna said in her stately way ; “ there is less love for work for its own sake now-a-days. It is regarded more as a labour than a pleasure.”

That made me look up at Aunt Susanna, and meeting her glance, which was one, I thought, of encouragement, I ventured to ask her—

“ But is work really a pleasure, Aunt Susanna ? ”

“ It ought to be, my dear. Life is given to us for work, not for idle pleasure only. We ought so to order our lives that in the work which God has given us to do, we find our chiefest pleasure.”

“ But if He doesn’t give us any ? ”

“ That never happens, Mary. Every station in life brings its own work, its own responsibilities, its own pleasures. But if we try just to grasp the pleasures and to shirk the work, we not only become useless members of the community,—useless to ourselves, to others, to God Himself—but we also soon begin to find that pleasure-seeking is

only toil of a worse kind—ashes instead of bread. Yet those who bind themselves upon the giddy wheel of pleasure, find themselves carried round and round by it in ever increasing velocity; and discover only, when it is too late, that they have cast away the substance for the shadow!"

I liked to hear Aunt Susanna talk, even when I did not quite understand her words. She made emphatic and suggestive motions with her hands; her eyes glowed very brightly; her small slim figure seemed to expand. She looked very old and very wise, I thought; and I had observed with some awe that she had not seemed the least bit afraid of Squire Rowntree of the booming voice; and had disagreed with him courageously several times. Her last words sounded rather awful. I hoped I should never be tied to any wheel and whirled round and round.

"Then, Aunt Susanna, we ought all of us to work? Can children work too?"

"Of course they can. Every child begins to have duties and tasks even from quite early infancy. Children should not be idle any more than grown persons."

Aunt Isabel began qualifying this statement with some rather fluttering explanations; but Aunt Susanna interposed in her quick way—

“Let the child alone, Isabel, with her own thought. Let her thrash it out her own way. Listen to me, Mary, my dear. Work and prayer are the two great powers in the world. They are so near akin that there is a Latin proverb which tells us that to labour is to pray. As you grow older you will better understand this; but you can begin to think about it even now.”

I liked the way Aunt Susanna would give us something to think about, without explaining it too much herself. I did not say anything about my new ideas to the boys when they came in that night. My mind was too confused. But as I lay in bed I began to remember what Mamma had said about always praying for Papa, that he might be made quite strong and well again. And mingling with this came the thought of that thirty pounds which was wanted to make him quite, quite well; and over and above that came memories of the Squire’s booming voice, with his diatribes against idleness and bad work, and those words Aunt Susanna had spoken soon afterwards—

“To labour is to pray, to labour is to pray!”

And saying this again and again to myself, and trying to make out what it could mean, I fell asleep.

## CHAPTER IV

SQUIRE ROWNTREE

“SPLENDIFEROUS!” cried Gordon.

“But what can we *do*? ” asked Roger.

Gordon was always very nice if you had an idea. It didn’t matter how impossible it was, he always liked it. Indeed the more impossible it seemed the better he liked it. Papa used to say he had the temperament of an enthusiast; and though I did not understand just what that was, it somehow seemed to fit Gordon, who always “went the whole hog” over things, as Nurse less elegantly expressed it.

Roger was nice in another way. He didn’t seem to care about things half so much at first. He asked awkward questions, and sometimes he declared one’s ideas were “all rot.” But if he once began, he would go on; he would go on when all the rest of us were tired and thought we’d had

enough. There was no stopping Roger if he'd made up his mind. Sometimes it was rather tiresome ; but often it was very convenient. I somehow felt now that if we could hit upon some idea for making money by the labour of our hands, Roger would see the thing through or perish in the attempt ! Gordon's enthusiasms were apt to cool. Fresh ideas pushed old ones aside. But there was no pushing Roger aside, once he had started. And that would be an advantage, I felt. If I could get him as an ally it would mean much.

"Thirty pounds !" spoke Cubbie in an awe-struck undertone, "O Jiminy ! "

"Dr. Armytage said that I had goldy-locks," said Dimples, ruffling up her sunny curls. "Couldn't we sell them to make money for Papa. Gold is money, isn't it ? "

" You darling !" I said, kissing her ; but I was afraid we should not get much by the sale of that fluff of yellow hair.

Roger had his hands in his pockets, and was staring out of the window. It was Gordon who was talking fast and eagerly now.

" I'm sure there's gold in the rocks about here. One has picked up lots of pieces as yellow as yellow. You know what they do out in Australia or California.

They peg out a claim, and wash the earth for gold dust, or pick it up in nuggets. Why, a single big nugget is worth lots more than thirty pounds. We'll go out prospecting ; we'll——”

“ Rot ! ” broke in Roger suddenly, “ that's all well enough for a game. But do you think if gold was to be had like that hereabouts, fellows would be rushing after it to the ends of the earth ? ”

“ Perhaps they haven't found it,” began Gordon, a little damped.

“ Bosh ! They'd have found it ages ago if it had been here, lying about promiscuous like.”

“ But I'll show you.”

“ O, I know all about your specimens. That's only quartz. It isn't worth the picking up. I asked Dr. Armytage myself about it when we met him walking through the quarry. Don't be an ass, Gordon, and fool away our time that fashion. If we've got to make thirty pounds amongst us, we can't let grass grow under our feet ! ”

“ O Roger—do you think we can ? ”

“ I don't know ; I'm thinking. Thirty pounds is an awful lot of money. If it had been three now.”

But it wasn't three. It was thirty. “ Perhaps had it been three there wouldn't have been so much

trouble over it. But I had prayed about it last night and again this morning. I knew that God could do anything we asked Him, if He thought it would be good for us. Three or thirty made no difference to Him. But then Mamma had often explained to us that God did not give us always just what we asked, because that would not be good for us. She and Papa did not give us all we thought we should like, just because we begged for it. We had always to remember that He knew best. And though He liked us to tell Him our wants, and to ask Him for things, it did not follow that He would always give them to us just in the way we hoped.

Only this asking was rather different from anything which had gone before. It was not just for ourselves we wanted this big lot of money. We should not touch a penny of it. Only if it would help Papa to get well—how splendid !

Roger suddenly spoke.

“ The only thing I can think of is for us to go and ask Squire Rowntree for a job.”

“ O Roger ; but what could we do ? ”

“ O, I don’t know ; but perhaps he could tell us. They say he has lots of money. Polly says he can’t get men to work for him the way he wants. We’d

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work just exactly his way, if he'd take us on. Any-way we might ask him."

Cubbie clapped his hands ; he thought this would be fine fun. He was growing a little tired of cricket every day. And to be doing things for the Squire sounded interesting. But Gordon's face was doubtful.

"I don't see what on earth we could do. We can't drive his horses or milk his cows or work in his gardens."

Now Roger was very fond of gardening. He had made a rockery for Aunt Isabel in one corner already. He had collected the stones from the wild places above and had wheeled them down in a barrow ; and he had got a lot of ferns out of a cleft by the stream, and had transplanted them very carefully ; and though their leaves had flagged and drooped, they were quite alive still, and Aunt Isabel had been very pleased, and said another year they would be quite strong and green again.

"I don't see why not," Roger said then ; "gardening is awfully jolly sort of work when you start. But we've got to ask him what he wants doing most."

It seemed as though the stars in their courses were fighting for us ; for that very evening Aunt

Isabel came up to see us at our six o'clock tea, and smilingly told us that the Squire had very kindly sent us an invitation to spend the next afternoon in his garden, and eat as much fruit as ever we liked.

I looked triumphantly at the boys; for this seemed just the very opening we wanted; though Aunt Isabel's next words rather dashed our hopes.

"I don't know whether you will see the Squire himself, dearies; as he is a bachelor he does not know much about young folks. But you will have a famous time in his gardens; and I am sure you will not get into mischief or injure his trees; and if you do see him before you go, you must thank him nicely for asking you to come."

Aunt Isabel paused, and I ventured to ask—

"Is he a—sort of—relation?"

"Scarcely that, dear; but a very distant connection. He used to take a good deal of notice of your mother when she was a little girl and came here; but I do not think he has ever noticed any other child." And then I saw Aunt Isabel looking at Dimples, and I remembered that Nurse always declared that our mother had been just like Dimples at her age. So perhaps Squire Rowntree would take a fancy to her, and that might be a great advantage.

"Does he know Papa too?" I asked, thinking it just as well to get all the information I could.

"He saw him once or twice when your mother brought him here a little while before her marriage; but since then I do not think they have met. When your parents had a home of their own, and a little family rising up about them, they had not much time to spend in visiting."

Then Aunt Isabel went away, and we looked at one another triumphantly. Gordon kicked up his feet till he kicked the table underneath and set all the plates and cups dancing.

"An omen!—an omen!" he cried; "we are going to get that thirty pounds by hook or by crook!"

Dimples was eyeing Gordon over her slice of bread and butter.

"What is an omen?" she asked, "and where's the hook and the crook?"

Something in the way Dimples asked her solemn questions always set us off laughing. She was quite used to this, and never pressed for any answer, but went on sedately with whatever she was doing. You often found out afterwards that Dimples heard and remembered a lot of things you never thought she had noticed at all.

The boys talked very fast all through the evening

about what they could do if Squire Rowntree would only give them employment. Gordon was brim full of wonderful ideas ; but Roger was always saying, " That's all rot ! " or something like that, which was rather annoying. Only I felt that for all the cold water he threw on Gordon's beautiful plans, he was as keen as anyone could be to earn the thirty pounds. Indeed, after Gordon had grown tired of talking, and had taken off Cubbie to look for the owls that generally flew through the garden at dusk, Roger did not go with them, but sat down in one of the window seats, and I saw that he had a slate and a pencil in his hands, and was doing sums.

After I had put Dimples to bed, as I often did for Nurse, if she were busy downstairs, I came back and sat down by Roger. It was getting very dark then, but I could see a lot of figures on his slate.

" What are you doing, Roger ? "

" I was just trying to work it out my own way."

" Work what out ? "

" Why, how much we'd be worth to the Squire, if he'd take us on and find us work."

" O Roger, tell me ! "

There seemed something practical about this way of looking at things, and I tried to see the figures on the slate, but they baffled me.

"It's like this, you see," pursued Roger. "The men about here get fifteen shillings a week; and I think Gordon and I could do as much as a man each. They're so precious slow, though of course they're stronger. But we've got strong—jolly strong. Cocky took us into the forge the other day, and we all helped to hammer at the hot iron. The blacksmith said we did famously, both of us. He felt our arms, and said we'd make jolly good smiths ourselves one day. Well, not to boast, I think we could work as well as one of the clodhoppers. So that would be thirty shillings a week; and then Cubbie might get ten by light sort of work, running errands and things; and perhaps you and Dimples might do something——" this a little doubtfully, but I was fired by the idea and answered—

"O Roger, yes. I can darn socks and house-linen—except the fine table-linen; and I daresay the Squire's wants a lot of things doing to it. And Dimples can thread needles, and wax cotton, and help fold up and put away."

"Well, then, say another ten shillings a week for the pair of you; that would make two pounds ten a week. So in a month it would be ten pounds, and in two months twenty pounds, and in three months thirty pounds!"

"O Roger! Thirty pounds would do it! But it has to be in two months—not three!"

"Well, but if we had the twenty pounds in hand, and the ten promised at the end of another month, I guess that would be right enough. Only don't you go jumping round like a mad hatter or a March hare, Polly; for suppose the Squire just laughs at us, and says he don't want a parcel of kids fooling about his place! Lots of 'em would."

This brought me to earth with a run again.

"But, Roger, we'd work so hard! We wouldn't behave like kids. It's for Papa and Mamma——"

"O bless you, I know; and I know you'd stick to your perch like a good 'un, Poll, and I guess I would too. But I ain't so certain sure about old Gordon; and the Cub is a bit of a flibertygibbet likewise——"

"O but, Roger, if the Squire trusted us!"

"If pigs could fly!" spoke Roger, hunching up his shoulders; "that's just the botheration of the whole thing. Is a crusty old fellow like that, who looks as though he never had been a boy himself, is he likely to trust us? Is he likely to pay us?"

"But if we worked for him?"

"Yes, he might offer us sixpence a day, perhaps."

That was one thing that made Roger tiresome.

He would begin by having such a glorious plan ; but afterwards, when you talked more about it, he would say things that spoiled everything. He called it looking at both sides of the shield, and having an impartial judgment ; but Gordon called it “blooming rot,” and occasionally boxed his ears for him.

Well, I did not know what to think about it ; but the thought of that thirty pounds, and the possibility of earning it by our joint endeavours, floated before my mental vision, and coloured the texture of my dreams.

The next afternoon was just splendid ! The sun shone so hot that the boys did not care about cricket ; but the walk to Cricklemoat, as the Squire’s house was called, was all shady and pleasant. It was not far away, only through “the forest,” as we called a big tract of wood that ran almost to the gates of Abbess Well. The Squire’s house was well hidden in trees, but from some of the adjoining high places we had looked down at it. One could see the line of the old moat, though now there was only water in a little bit of it. The rest was dry, and filled with shrubs and flowers ; and beyond the great house were a great many walled gardens, leading out of one another ; and beyond that more

woods and wild places, climbing up to the hills behind. He had some farms, too, with pasture and corn lands ; but these were away towards the village of Crickle Abbot. The Squire used to ride about on a stout cob, and we had seen him several times on the roads, as well as in his big pew in church on Sunday. But he had never seemed to notice us ; and so it seemed rather strange to be finding ourselves on the way to his house.

It was evident that we were expected ; but we were not taken to the master of the house. We were shown through a big hall and out at another door at the opposite side, which led into the sunny garden. And here we were met by a gardener, who touched his hat and grinned affably as he said—

“ Be you the young ladies and gen’lemen as have coom to eat Squire’s fruit. This way, then, and we’ll not grumble at what ye please to take. There be a terrible lot o’ plums and peaches this year, that there be. Housekeeper, she’s fair puzzled to know what to do wi’ what I brings in for the house ; and the Squire he never was one to sell his garden stuff. So you may help yourselves, and not be afraid ! ”

With that he opened a door in a rose-clad wall,

very big and burly, coming down one of the long paths towards us. The boys took off their caps, and Dimples made the duckiest little curtsey. The Squire said a few things to us, in his rather jerky way, staring at us out of his keen blue eyes. Then he stooped down and made a grab at Dimples, and swung her suddenly to his shoulder.

Dimples was accustomed to be treated like this by Papa. She wasn't a bit afraid, the darling! But just put her arms round his neck, as she did round Papa's at home.

She had the dearest, little, soft, cuddly arms, and I think the Squire liked the feel of them, for he said in a different sort of voice—

“Well, my dear, and have you got everything you want?”

And then to our amazement and horror Dimples answered very sweetly—

“We've had a lovely lot of fruit, sank you; but what we really and truly want is fifty pounds; and we haven't got that—yet!”

## CHAPTER V

### A FRIEND IN NEED

WE all stood aghast, except Cubbie, who saw nothing very strained in the situation. The Squire swung Dimples to the ground again, and then took her up in his arms. She was quite serene and unruffled, and looked at him with her pretty coaxing smile.

" You lift me about like Papa, only you are more stronger than him. Poor Papa has been ill a long time now. I'd like to send him all the bootiful fruit in this garden to make him well!"

" Well, you shall send him a fine hamper any day you like, my dear ; and choose what you like best to put in it. I have some grapes in another place that I'll show you too. But what about this thirty pounds you spoke of. I want to hear some more about that!"

The Squire sat down on the edge of a great stone

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tank that stood on the shady side of the garden, where the gardeners came for water.

I felt my face all in a flame, and Gordon and Roger were both on the fidget; but Dimples, perched on the Squire's knee, was perfectly at ease, though she looked at me to come and help her out.

"It's for Papa, too," she said, "but Polly can explain betterer than me."

Then I felt the keen eyes of the Squire turned upon me. My heart went pit-a-pat between excitement and fear.

"What has Mary to explain? Don't be afraid to speak out, my dear. I'll listen to all you have to say. Begin at the beginning, and let me hear."

And suddenly as the Squire spoke I ceased to be afraid. All at once it was easy to tell him.

"Please, it was something I heard Nurse tell Cookie in the night, when they didn't know I could hear them. They said that something would take thirty pounds, only they did not see how it was to be got, after all the expenses. And next day I asked Nurse what they meant; and she told me that it was for a sea-voyage for Papa when he was well enough to come out of the sort of hospital place where he is; so that he should not have to spend November in England, but get into the

sunshine, and not get back till Christmas, when he would be quite strong again. Only Nurse said she didn't think he could go, because Mamma did not think they could spare the thirty pounds. And it did seem such a pity. And we began to think, and think, and think——”

I looked at the boys ; but neither of them came to my aid. I could see that they were just awfully interested and excited to know what the Squire would say ; but they meant me to tell him what we had thought of. I think boys always fancy that girls like to do the talking ; but I didn't really like it, though I wasn't exactly afraid any more.

“ And what did you make out after all that combined thinking ? ” asked the Squire.

“ Do you remember telling Aunt Susanna and Aunt Isabel that you could not get men to work as you liked now ? ”

“ Yes, I remember very well. It's true.”

“ Well, we wondered if we could work for you. We would do everything you told us. The boys are very strong. We haven't any lessons to do now, and we are allowed to be out all day, and to do as we like, if we don't get into mischief. Working for you wouldn't be mischief. And I can do things too. I can weed very well, Aunt Isabel says ;

and I can sew and mend ; and Cubbie is very quick running errands, or doing odd jobs, though of course he isn't as strong as the others. But we're five of us, and we'd work as hard as hard, if you'd only try us ! And—and——”

“ Yes, my dear, what else ? ”

“ Well, we thought—if you would give us—wages—what you thought we deserved——”

I found I could not suggest two pounds ten a week, though I shivered as I thought of Roger's gloomy suggestion of sixpence a day ! If he were to decide that that was about our market value, the thirty pounds would be almost as distant as ever.

The Squire was rubbing his chin, and his hand covered his mouth ; but I thought the gleam in his eyes was kindly.

“ You mean that you want to earn some money to help your father to this sea-voyage in the fall of the year. Is that it ? ”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ And your time is really your own ? You can work for me without interfering with any plans your aunts have made for you ? ”

“ Yes, truly we can. And I'm sure if they knew what it was for, they'd be glad for us to come. I

know they would give the thirty pounds themselves if they could ; but they can't. You see we eat so much—and there are five of us."

" Bless my soul ! " suddenly exclaimed the Squire, " Children like you have no business to be thinking of the cost of your keep ! " and the big voice went booming on for a few minutes, though we did not understand all that it said.

But Roger's face was beginning to glow with satisfaction and pride.

" He's going to do something, Polly—I'm dead sure of it. You're a little brick for a girl—and he's going to be a big one ! "

Roger was right. I think the Squire was thinking hard whilst he boomed in that funny way of his, all in jerky sentences that you could not make much sense of. Then he got up suddenly, swung Dimples up to his shoulder again, and just saying to the rest of us, " Come on ! " he marched away towards a garden door, though not the one we had come in by.

He led us through several gardens with walls, and outside there was a piece of rough ground and a tool shed.

Here he suddenly halted and said to the boys, " Go in and get a spade and a pick and a hoe,

and let me see if you've got any notion of handling tools."

Now the boys always kept our garden at home nice, working under Papa; and Papa was always particular that they should do things neatly and the right way. So they really were good at handling tools, as well as strong. After the Squire had watched them for a few minutes he said,

"Not so bad for young cockneys—now come on!"

It was rather like Alice in Wonderland being ordered about like this, not knowing what was going to happen next; but it was quite interesting, and if the Squire was really going to be our friend, and pay us wages for doing things for him, how perfectly splendid that would be!

We had to walk rather a long way before the Squire paused, and the ground went on getting more and more up-hill too. There was a little spinney of larches that we went through, and then we crossed a little stone bridge and saw a stream tumbling down from the heights above, and almost directly we came to a very queer-looking bit of ground where the Squire stood quite still looking about him.

On each side of this piece of ground was a yew

hedge—at least once it had been a hedge, but it was all grown wild and unkempt ; though it made a thick green wall on each side. At the bottom end one could see that there had been yews once, just the same as along the sides ; but these yews were all torn up by the roots, lying higgledy-piggledy. At the top end was a queer little place which looked as though once it had been a sort of garden house or little temple, but now it had no roof, and the walls were partly broken down, and moss had grown all over it, and tall grass everywhere. And as for the ground itself, it was all in a mess, stones and earth in heaps, and nothing growing there but weeds—just a piece of wild rubbish ground—only somehow queerer than a real rubbish ground, because you could somehow tell by looking at it that some time it had been quite different.

"I say though!" cried Gordon as he surveyed it, "it looks as though you'd had an earthquake here!"

"Well, the effect was pretty much the same," answered the Squire; "we had a cloud-burst!"

"A how-much?" Roger breathed softly; but Cubbie asked quite boldly,

"What's that, sir?"

"Something which very occasionally happens in

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this country, more often in hilly districts than in plains. This particular one came with a terrific thunder-storm, which had itself followed some very heavy summer rains. It was as though the rain-clouds just burst over this hillside, without taking the trouble to discharge in rain. The centre of the storm seemed to be here, where we are standing. This was a quaint old fragment of a monastic garden before the cloud-burst, and yonder stood what old-fashioned books call a gazebo—a sort of summer house where people can sit to gaze at their gardens I suppose. After the storm it was—what you see!"

We looked about us, trying to think what it could have been like before, and Gordon whistled, and Dimples said—

"O!" in a very surprised little voice.

"There used to be a hedge all round it, except just where the gazebo broke the line; but you see what havoc was wrought. There is scarcely a vestige of the top hedge, and the bottom one was uprooted and struck by lightning, and has been as you see it ever since."

"And you didn't do anything, sir?"

"No, I did not. The wreck was so complete, I hardly knew where to begin, and I have plenty

to look after elsewhere, and I'm getting an old man—too old for laying out gardens afresh."

He paused and seemed to sweep us all over with his bright blue eyes.

"All the same it seems a pity. Once it was a very quaint-looking, pretty spot. And if I could see my way to having it turned back into garden again, without any bother to myself—why I'd be glad to pay the piper!"

We exchanged glances. I felt my breath coming and going. There could only be one interpretation we could put upon such a speech.

Gordon burst out excitedly--

"Do you mean you will let us do it for you—and give us wages?"

"I mean something like that; but not quite what you say. I'll put it my own fashion."

We gazed breathlessly at him. Dimples had scrambled down from her perch by this time, but was still clinging to his hand. She flashed me a triumphant glance. Darling Dimples! It was she who had set the ball rolling.

"Now look here, my lads and lassies," spoke the Squire kindly, "it's like this about this bit of garden ground. It's no good to me to have it half done, and left all in a muddle, because you young folks

have got tired of the job. I'd as soon it stayed as it is. But if you like to take on the job, and carry it through, and hand me over a garden—of a sort—in place of what you see here now, then you shall have the thirty pounds you want as your reward. But I won't pay wages. It shall be piece work—the whole job or nothing. And don't you take it on if you're the kind to get tired of a new game, or a new task in about a week or fortnight. For this job isn't going to be done under a couple of months, and with steady work too. Don't you make any mistake about that. And don't think you've got an old fool to deal with, who will give you the money whether you've earned it or not!"

Gordon drew himself up very straight and square.

"Indeed, sir, we would none of us touch your money unless we had earned it fairly."

"That's right, boy, that's the right spirit. Now I shan't take your answer to-day. You must stop here and think it over, and you must go home and ask your aunts about it. I'll give you a note to take to them when you leave. It isn't going to be play, I can tell you. It will be steady, solid work, hard work some of it; though there are always lighter tasks about a garden which little girls can help in. Yes, my boy, did you want to ask anything?"

This to Roger, who was evidently eager to speak.  
“I want to know, sir, where we are to get the things we shall want, gravel, you know, and turf, and plants to put in. We haven’t any money to speak of——”

“Tut-tut, that won’t be wanted. I am Lord of the Manor here.”

“What is that ? ”

“Well, it carries a good many things with it ; but to you it means that whatever you want in the matter of such things as you have mentioned, you can get without cost. It will be just the trouble of digging and carrying to you ; and if you incur any legitimate expenses, they will be allowed for extra ; so you can keep an account against me.”

“What are legitimate expenses ? ”

“That you will have to find out for yourself. You may have to charter a donkey or even a horse for some of your work. If you do, make your own bargain ; but what you spend out of your own small funds shall be reimbursed. I’d rather you made your own arrangements. I don’t want to help or to hinder you, or to know anything about it, or be bothered in any way. You put your heads together, and see what you can manage amongst you ; and if you don’t get tired or disheartened,

and have something respectable to show at the end, why, then, my dear," and here the Squire stooped down and put a finger under Dimples' chin, "why, then I see no reason why you should not get that thirty pounds which you say you want so badly."

"For poor Papa," spoke Dimples gravely.

"For poor Papa, of course, my dear."

Then the Squire stood upright once more and looked round at us as though he were taking our measure.

"You will find tools in that shed we passed ; and you can look over the odds and ends you will find in the big lumber shed which my men call the granary. Any of them will show it you. There are a lot of things stored away there, garden seats and flower tubs and things like that. If you think any of them will be of use to you, you can have them. But now I'll say good-bye to you. I've got my business to do at home. You had better stop here and have a good look round. Then go back and have as much fruit as you can eat or carry away. Yes, my dear, and the hamper shall go off to your parents soon. I'll see to that. And you can tell me after church on Sunday morning what you have decided about the garden, and whether you think you can take on the job."

We had decided already, every one of us ; but we did not say anything. We none of us spoke a word till the tall figure of the Squire had disappeared down the hill, and then the boys flung their caps high into the air and whooped aloud with joy.

"Thirty pounds ! Thirty pounds ! O Jiminy ! "

"Thirty pounds ! Thirty pounds ! And Papa will get quite well, won't he, Polly ? "

"What an old brick the Squire is ! "

"Why, we shall be as rich—as rich—as—Robinson Crusoe ! " spoke Cubbie, quite awed ; whilst Gordon went off into a shout of laughter.

"Not Crusoe, you little blockhead, Crœsus is the chap you mean ! I say, Polly, you don't think it's all a hoax ? "

"I'm sure it isn't ; but, Gordon, it will be a big job. It will take us all our time. We shan't be able to take time off for cricket, not often. Because if it isn't done properly, we shan't get anything ! "

"But it will be done properly ! " cried Gordon. "Who cares for cricket, if there's work like this to be done ? "

We fell to discussing all together as to what we would do ; but I thought best of all would be to ask Aunt Isabel to show us the pictures of some

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gardens in a book she had. The boys did not seem to care much how we laid it out, so long as it was done well enough to please the Squire. They liked the idea of hard work, digging and delving and wheeling things about. I had a vision of a little trickling waterfall leaping from stone to stone somewhere. The brook ran down the side of the hill outside the yew hedge ; but perhaps we could coax a little stream inside if we tried.

“ Jolly ! ” cried Gordon, when I suggested the idea. Indeed, every idea which struck any of us seemed first-rate. We went home discussing it all the way ; and in the evening, when we came to say good-night to the aunts, we found that they had also been debating the plan together.

Aunt Susanna looked at us through her spectacles.

“ I hope that you will appreciate the kindness of the Squire. Not only will the help to your parents be very welcome, if you can’t carry out his plan ; but the benefit to yourselves will be considerable.”

“ Do you mean the thirty pounds, Aunt Susanna, if we earn it ? ”

“ No, my dear, I mean something far more precious than silver or gold. I mean the habit of perseverance, which I trust that this task will aid you to acquire. Without patience and perseverance

you will accomplish nothing. And these are qualities which can only be acquired with some trouble. You have a very strong inducement to persevere and to conquer difficulties and exercise your ingenuity and powers of invention. I trust and hope that you will endeavour to justify the confidence the Squire has put in you, and earn the very generous reward he holds out."

We went away gravely, as we always did; for Aunt Susanna invariably inspired us with awe; but once back in our play-room Gordon exclaimed almost angrily—

"Why need she jaw about it like that? As though we should ever get tired!"

## CHAPTER VI

### SETTING TO WORK

"**A**UNT ISABEL, may we—put it—in our—prayers?"

It was Sunday evening, and Nurse had gone to church, so Aunt Isabel came up to take our candle away when the boys and I were in bed.

"Put what in your prayers, my dear?"

"Why, Aunt Isabel, about the garden, I mean!"

For that morning we had told the Squire that we had quite decided; and we were going to start work on Monday. He had nodded his head; but he reminded us of the conditions: if we gave up in the middle there would be no thirty pounds. That was quite fair, we saw. A bad job, left half done, would be worse than nothing at all. We had eagerly agreed; for we were all what now-a-days is called "keen as mustard" over it. Only as I sat up in my bed thinking about it all, I began to wonder whether it was not rather a big undertaking. And

I remembered how Mamma always said that whenever we undertook any new duties or new work, we ought always to ask God's help over it.

But I didn't quite know how to put it in my prayers about that garden ; so I waited to ask Aunt Isabel. When she understood what I meant she hesitated a moment, and looked round, as she had a way of doing, as though to see what Aunt Susanna thought. But Aunt Susanna was not here, so she had to answer without her.

"I think it would be a very good plan, dear Mary, for you to pray for perseverance and patience, for cheerfulness and good temper. Because, my love, though you are all so eager to begin this task, you will not find it an easy one. And when little folks get puzzled and tired, and hot and worried, they are apt to get cross too, and to fall out amongst themselves, and that is a great hindrance to work—"

"Like the Tower of Babel ! " I said, remembering a story Papa had told us about it, and Aunt Isabel added—

"Nothing can be done without agreement amongst the workers. Gordon has a hot temper, though he is a dear boy ; and Roger can irritate him and be very stubborn. You will have to try and be the little peacemaker when troubles arise ; and you

may surely ask God's help and blessing on that. And we know that we may always ask Him to prosper our handiwork, so long as that handiwork is a right and proper thing."

"O thank you, Aunt Isabel," I said, "I just wanted to understand about that." And when Aunt Isabel had gone, I jumped out of bed and knelt by the open window and said—

"O God, please prosper our handiwork, and help me to be a peacemaker if the boys quarrel; and make us all patient and persevering; for Jesus Christ's sake, Amen."

Then I got back into bed and slept like a top till morning.

I taught Dimples the part of the prayer about prospering our handiwork when she said her prayers to me in the morning. She liked saying it very much, and we prayed it several times over. I did not say anything to the boys, for they were so excited and skittish. I thought I would wait for a better opportunity. Boys don't care for talking about that sort of thing; yet I know they often think quite as much as girls do, though perhaps they forget rather quicker when other things come to fill their minds.

We were all dressed in our oldest clothes, and we

ate our breakfast in a mighty hurry. We were to have a basket packed with sandwiches and hard-boiled eggs to take with us on working days, and then to have some meat with our six o'clock tea when we got home. That was the arrangement Aunt Susanna made for us, which was very kind of her ; for we thought we should have to come home every day at one o'clock, and that would take up such a lot of time. Nurse was surprised that Aunt Susanna had cared to alter her arrangements, and told us that many old ladies would not have done it. But then there was the thirty pounds to think of. And bye-and-bye I learned to know that there was more than the thirty pounds in wise Aunt Susanna's head when she smoothed our path for us. Too long holidays and too much play are not good for children. And she no doubt felt that we should learn a great deal, as well as form habits of diligence and industry over this task of ours, which would be far better than spending the day in play and amusement ; so she did everything she could to make things easy for us, and not too tiring.

We walked along through the wood in great spirits. Every flower or pretty bush we saw Dimples wanted us to dig up and take with us "to put in

the garden ; " but we had to explain that nothing would grow there yet. We had to make the beds first before we could plant anything.

" But in the woods the fings don't want beds," Dimples objected ; and that was true enough ; yet we felt it would be no good to take them along with us now.

" I'm going to have a stream running through it," said Roger ; " I'm sure we can get that brook to come our way if we try hard enough. A garden is twice as jolly with water ! "

" I think we'll have an Alpine garden for part of it," said Gordon ; " Alpine gardens are awfully jolly, all stones and rocks and things piled up, and that's most what we've got—any amount ! And they don't want a great lot of soil either. I read that in the book Aunt Isabel showed us about gardens. I thought it was a wrinkle for us."

" I want to have lavender bushes, and roses and fings like that, 'cause they smells nice," said Dimples.

" I want to have a sun-dial in the middle, and some turf round it, and then paths coming out and dividing the beds," this was my contribution to the scheme. I had been much taken by a picture in Aunt Isabel's book of a garden like that, with great yew hedges all round it. Only those yew hedges

had looked almost like green walls and ours were so straggly. But Aunt Isabel had told us that yew hedges could be cut in to look like green walls, and Cubbie had whispered to me that he would bring a big pair of scissors and cut in ours !

At any rate we did not lack for ideas at starting ; only when we arrived at our journey's end, and saw the rough unkempt piece of ground we had to tackle, it seemed to regard us with an expression of mocking hostility and defiance, as though it dared us to bring it back to its former state of order and trimness.

"O Jiminy !" cried Gordon laughing, as he flung off his coat preparatory to running off to the shed for such tools as we thought we should want. "It looks a bit bigger and stonier than it did last week. But we'll tackle him—never fear ! "

Dimples and Bob were deputed to carry the basket and such superfluous things as we cast off for working purposes up to the ruined gazebo for safety, whilst we went foraging for tools. Her little voice reached us in a shrill call before we were out of hearing.

"Bring me a broom and duster, please. This is a very dirty catidly place. I'm going to be cleaning it out ! "

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A duster was beyond us ; but we got a garden broom and some bits of sacking ; and it was a sight to see Dimples trying to wield the former, and to get the accumulation of mess and rubbish out of the little house. She was perfectly happy over her share of the task, and we were free to think about ours.

"Aunt Susanna said, you remember, boys, that it was no use beginning to work till we knew what we meant to do. Only Aunt Isabel did say that to clear the ground of loose stones and rubbish might be a good way of starting, and would give us time to get accustomed to its size, and to get ideas about it. Suppose to-day we just clear away the big stones. Aunt Isabel said they would all come in afterwards for edging the paths."

"All right," answered Gordon, "we've got an old barrow, so here goes!" And he started forthwith, tugging at the biggest stone he could see. "O Jiminy—but it's a whopper! Lend a hand you other two!"

We all helped to dislodge and get it into the barrow, and then we set to work after others. When we had the barrow filled, we discussed where we should take them to.

"Up to the top," said Gordon. "Some of them

will come in handy for mending the gazebo walls when we've time to think of that. And when we want them, it'll be easier to carry them down hill than up—so here goes!"

It is easy to say "here goes!" but nothing did go! Our united efforts would not stir that barrow with its load of stones, still less push it up the hill over the rough ground. We tried till we were all running down with heat, and then we gave it up.

"Bless me! but it's hot work!" said Gordon, and sat him down upon the load with a cheerful face.

Roger looked more disturbed; there was a grim look about his mouth which I very well knew.

"Well, if we can't get the loaded barrow up the hill, we must take half the load out and try again."

"No fear," answered Gordon laughing, "We shan't do it with half the load. We can't get the stuff up anyhow. The slope's too steep."

"Then we must take them out of the barrow and carry them," quoth Roger relentlessly.

Cubbie rushed forward to possess himself of a stone to carry; but Gordon sat and swung his foot.

"I don't see the sense of wheeling them up hill at all," he remarked.

"Why, you said it yourself!"

"I never said I didn't, stupid! But a fellow can

change his mind. I'm not sure there's any sense in collecting stones at all. We may want them where they are."

I felt that the boys were rather near a quarrel—not a bad one, but just one of those little squabbles about almost nothing that sometimes spoil the whole day. What could I think of to stop it?

"Suppose we pile the big stones in the very middle of the ground, where I want to put the sun-dial—if we can make one or find one. We could pretend the heap of stones was the sun-dial, and think how to arrange the beds and paths round it. And then the stones would not be too far away from anything when we begin to lay out the garden properly."

Luckily that idea pleased both the boys. Gordon jumped off the barrow, and with the measuring tape Aunt Isabel had lent us, we started taking the exact measure of our domain, and calculating what was the centre.

This was quite interesting, and it seemed like making a sort of start. Then we found that our barrow was not far away from this central spot, and we managed to turn it over and so the big stone came out on the top, and we carried it to the place we had marked, set it as a sort of "foundation

stone " for our labours, and piled the rest all round it.

After that we worked away with great zeal adding to the pile ; and really when we had made a collection of all the biggest and roughest stones, the ground itself began to look just a little less wild and hopeless.

We knew how the time went, because we could hear the Squire's stable-yard clock chime every quarter. At twelve o'clock Gordon flung down the pick-axe he had been using to loosen some of the larger stones and cried—

" Working men always have their dinner at twelve. And I'm blowed if we won't do the same ! I'm as hungry as a hunter, and as thirsty as a fish ! "

I did not think Aunt Susanna would quite like to hear Gordon say he'd be " blowed " about anything ; but it was his way of asserting his independence as a working man, I suppose. We were all more than ready to follow him up to the gazebo. Dimples had been very busy and very quiet up there all the morning, only coming now and then to look at us, and hurrying back to her work very quickly. She had tied a bit of sacking over her pretty yellow curls, as she saw the woman in the cottages tie handkerchiefs round their heads when they swept and cleaned. Her face was beaming

with pride as she ushered us into the funny little place.

"I've gotted our dinner ready. It looks very nice. I've found a sort of a table and scrubbed it clean. It doesn't look so very clean yet ; but that's because I've not got soap and a brush. I'll do it better to-morrow. I fink I know where Cookie frows away her old brushes. I'll go and get one ! "

"Bravo, young 'un ! " cried Gordon, as he stepped into the little old garden lodge. Dimples had really been quite clever. She was always so neat and particular and clean over her dolls' houses at home, that this sort of work came easy to her. There really had been a table here in past days. It had got all its legs broken off ; but that did not much matter ; for there were plenty of bricks lying inside the house, and Dimples had propped it up on little piles of these quite securely, and made us little piles to sit on too. She had spread out the food on big dock leaves she had found, and had got water from the brook in the nice bright tin pail that Aunt Isabel had given us at the last minute, in case we should be in any difficulty about water. There was a horn cup to drink out of, and we all filled it again and again before we were satisfied. It was just delicious, that water ! I have

never tasted any quite so pure or refreshing since. Perhaps because I have never worked with my hands quite so hard as we did all those weeks of our Great Undertaking.

Then we set to upon our provisions, and our tongues wagged as fast as fast all the while.

The boys were coming round to my idea of the sun-dial set in a ring of turf, and then gravel paths radiating from it, and between the paths beds for roses or lavender or any other shrubs or flowers that we could obtain or make to grow. Not that this hindered Gordon from having an Alpine garden at the bottom. Indeed, we thought that would be a very good place for one. Because it was all rough and untidy there, where the old yew trees had been torn up by the roots and lay about anyhow. A great deal of the wood had been cut away; but the roots still made great untidy mounds.

"We might pile them up with earth and more stones," Gordon said, "and make quite a grand rockery for the lower border, with a gravel path alongside. We could get some ferns to stick in, if we can't get Alpines; a fernery would do almost as well. And if we can get water for it ferns will grow like anything!"

"O, we'll have the water, never you fear!" cried

Roger. "Why, there's a regular sort of channel as it is all down one of the side hedges, where the storm tore its way, I suppose. We'll have to make a dam somewhere in the bed of the stream, and get some of the water to run along to this gully, and then it'll just come tumbling down its own self. We can deepen the gully, and make the water run over Gordon's rockery if we like ; and it would be awfully nice to have a fish-pond in one corner, and puddle it round with clay, and then let the water back to the brook by an outlet somewhere ! "

We were just brimming with ideas ! This was going to be the grandest game ever invented, to say nothing of the golden reward looming in the distance !

Cubbie had run out into the sunshine once more, for Bob had been growling and giving little sharp barks that we had been too busy to notice at the moment. Now he came toiling back with a beaming face and a great basket of plums and early pears which he held up for our inspection.

"A man said the Squire had sent them up to us ! " he explained, as we all fell upon the luscious fruit. "Oh, what a day we're having ! O Jiminy ! "

After our food and rest we started to work again ; but the sun was very, very hot, and I think perhaps

we were rather tired, though we would not allow it. Anyway the pile of stones did not increase very fast, and Gordon suddenly suggested—

“Let’s go to the granary, and ask where it is, and see what we can find there. We might get some ideas ; and Aunt Isabel said we ought to have ideas before we went to work.”

I thought myself we were rather overburdened with ideas ; but the suggestion of a change of occupation was attractive. The boys put on their jackets, and I smoothed down my holland smock, and calling to Cubbie and Dimples where we were going—they preferred staying in the gazebo, where they were still hard at work—we made our way down into the region of walled garden, and presently met a gardener, who good-naturedly took us through a circuitous path which led to a yard enclosed by sheds and buildings, one of which proved to be the granary.

“Theer be a power of rubbidge in along theer,” said the man with a grin, “I be a-gowin’ to cut chaff in yon shed. If so be as you want a hand, you call to I. I’ll shift the things about for you, sartin sure will I.”

I think he’d have stopped with us if we had asked him ; but we thought it fairer to do every-

thing ourselves if we could, and we liked being alone too. We plunged into a dusty region of cobwebs and lumber, which mightily fascinated us.

"A tent!" shouted Gordon. "Why, we might roof in the gazebo with that, so that if it rained we should have a jolly shelter to run to!"

"I say," cried Roger, who was diving farther under the eaves, "there are no end of garden seats and things! We could have a regular encampment in the gazebo or outside! And I declare! I'm sure there's something here like a stone basin! I believe it's a bit of an old fountain! O Jiminy! Just the very thing for us! We'll have gold-fish there!"

I scarcely heard the boys' eager talk, for I was prospecting about for myself in another dusty corner. And before long I had my great find too!

"O Gordon—Roger! do come and look! I'm almost sure it's a sun-dial!"

## CHAPTER VII

### PROGRESS

A SUN-DIAL it was! There was no mistake about that! We tugged and we hauled; but we had to ask our new friend, who informed us that his name was "Gearge," to come to our aid before we could unearth it and drag it out into the light. It was covered with dirt and cobwebs; but Gearge produced a broom, and there was a pump and water in the yard, and after a while we got it to look wonderfully cleaner between us, whilst the boys dragged out all sorts of things which they decided would be useful; and Gearge scratched his head with a reflective air when we asked him how we could get them up to our place of toil.

"Happen I'd get a horse and cart for the asking," he hazarded; and indeed it seemed as though only a horse and cart could tackle such a load.

"Would that be fair?" I asked the boys. "It wouldn't be doing things ourselves quite."

Gordon was for saying that that didn't matter, it wasn't making the garden. But Roger agreed with me that we ought to know ; and off he started in search of the Squire, whom Gearge had seen not long ago about the gardens, and he came speedily racing back to say that it was "all right." It was only what railway companies had to do for people, deliver goods that they had bought. And whilst the cart was loading up, he walked into the yard himself, and stood looking at the collection of treasures we had amassed.

The sun-dial was in three pieces, and I was puzzling out some letters cut into it round one rim. They were funny letters, and not many of them ; but they were not English words, and I did not know what they meant.

"Can you read them, Mary ?" asked the Squire.  
"I'm trying. I think it's Latin ; but the boys are too busy to explain them. Can you ?"

The Squire read them to me—  
"Fugit hora—ora." And as I looked up for an explanation, he said—

"That means, 'The hour flies—pray.'"  
"How funny !" I said.  
"What is funny ?" he asked.  
Then I got very red and hung my head.

"I was only thinking of something Aunt Isabel and I were talking about this morning," and as he still continued to look at me I had to go on, and I said in a very small voice, "It was about our garden, and our prayers. Aunt Isabel said we might say 'Prosper Thou our handiwork.' So Dimples and I did. And look at all the things we've got already!"

Then Gearge came and lifted in the sun-dial piece by piece, and the cart rumbled away, and we ran after it; and as the sun shone down on the load the words cut into the edge of the dial seemed to nod and smile at me—

#### FUGIT HORA—ORA.

I'm afraid we didn't do much more work that day; but we had made a good beginning; and when Gearge had carried up our treasures into the gazebo, and ranged the seats along the walls and put the rustic table\*in the middle, it really looked quite grand and furnished. We spoke to him about the roofing it in with canvass, and he scratched his head and looked doubtful, I thought.

"Happen it moight be better than nowt," he said, "but 'twould soon sag in and drip turrable, and that would be almost worser than the rain."

We went home tired, but very happy. We had

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begun to see our way. Roger was full of ideas about the broken basin of the old fountain which he had found. Gearge said there was another of them lying "somewheres about" the place. Roger said they would look fine at each end of the rockery, and that they could be mended with cement or "puddled" with clay, so that water would stay in them. And Dimples skipped and danced at the idea of having gold-fish in them. In fact our ideas became so grand and ambitious, that there was nothing we did not think we could manage in time!

For three happy days we toiled on, cleaning the rubbish from the ground, and collecting all the stones that we thought would come in useful into the heap in the middle. We had a big bonfire going now outside the yew hedges, and it was rather fun burning all the stuff there, and doing a little cooking sometimes. Cubbie was very clever in catching fish in his hands out of a pool in the stream up above; and Gordon knew how to kill and clean them, and then we fried them by the fire on hot stones. The boys liked them very much, and Dimples called them delicious. But she was so sorry for the poor little fishes that she did not really like eating them, and I thought they were

rather nasty, though I never dared to say so. But it was fun boiling water in a queer old pot we found and cleaned, and pretending we made tea. It was plum tea really, and was quite nice when you were thirsty ; but I sometimes thought we began to play too much over our meals, and did not work quite so hard as we ought. Our heap of stones did not get on so fast as it had done the first day ; but then Gordon had begun to make his rockery at the bottom of the ground, and Cubbie was trying to cut the yew hedges with a funny little clipping thing which one of the gardeners had given him. And Roger was always going up stream to decide in his own mind where his dam and water-course were to be, which of course had to be settled on soon ; only it rather hindered the other work.

And I wanted so much to get on, so that the sun-dial could be set up. I was almost sorry now that I had let the stones be put there ; but that was before I knew we could get a real sun-dial. I wanted them away now ; but the boys said they did no harm there, and that the sun-dial was all right where it was, which of course was true, only I wanted to get it into place, and to clear a nice circle round it for turf.

“It’s not the right season for turfing, Silly-billy,”

Gordon said to me the fourth day, when I tried to make him leave his rockery and see about laying out the centre bit.

"What do you mean?"

"Why, I don't believe you can cut or lay turf till it gets a lot cooler than this—not unless you had heaps of water anyhow."

"Well, but there is water; and Roger's going to bring it right through the garden."

"Then wait till he does, and don't bother me!"

"I think we ought to begin in the middle!"

"Do you? Then I don't! The right thing is always to begin at one end or the other. I've got this end in hand and I'll stick to it!"

"But Aunt Isabel said—"

"Drattle Aunt Isabel! I'm going on with my rockery, I tell you!"

Now I thought that "drattle" was probably a very naughty word, though our friend Gearge did use it if things went amiss, and Gordon had copied it from him. But I was quite sure Aunt Susanna and Aunt Isabel would be shocked to hear him, so I said severely—

"If you begin to use bad words, Gordon, you won't go to heaven when you die!"

Gordon turned round very quickly, and as he

had a long hoe in his hand, he caught me a rap on the legs which toppled me over, and though I was not hurt, I was very much offended. Gordon just stood a moment to make sure I was not hurt, and then he said quite short and huffily—

“ You mind your own business, Miss, and I'll mind mine. You're a deal too cheeky—laying down the law to your elders and betters ! You put that in your pipe and smoke it ! ”

Then he went on with his rockery again, and I marched off with my head in the air.

“ Betters indeed ! ” I was furious at the word. Of course the boys were older than I ; that I was never allowed to forget. But better ! I was not going to admit that—not for a moment ! And Aunt Isabel had said—but what was the use of going all over that again ? The boys would go their own way. They were just selfish pigs, they—

Was that such a very pretty word either ? I had got into the shade by this time ; the shady corner where the sun-dial had been deposited by Gearge, and had remained ever since. Its base made quite a nice seat when it was hot, and you could see the other part of it lying on the ground. I could read the motto quite plainly :—“ Fugit hora—ora ! ”

I remembered very well what that meant. But

I confess I did not feel at all like praying at that moment. It was not the time for prayers ; and I had said mine quite properly that morning too. And yet our handiwork did not seem to be prospering quite so well as at the first. I looked about me, and could not see that the ground looked so wonderfully better for our toil. And I had thought we had done so much.

“ It’s because the boys won’t stick to things properly,” I began to grumble. “ If they would only get the sun-dial up and the circle cut out for the turf, and the paths—then we could be getting on ; but they just want to do as they like—that’s always the way with boys ! ”

I was talking half aloud, as I sometimes do when I am vexed, and particularly if I think I am alone ; so that I quite jumped at the sound of a little voice close beside me.

“ Don’t girls want to do as they like, Polly dear ? I’m afraid I do ! ”

And there was Dimples standing beside me and looking quite grave and serious, as though she felt conscious of some serious fault.

“ You darling ! ” I said, “ how hot you look ; come and sit in the shade and rest.”

Dimples sat down contentedly at my feet, and

old Bob at hers. I think they both began to dose in the drowsy heat of the afternoon. But I was very wide awake, and I kept hearing Dimple's innocent question repeated over and over again.

"Don't girls want to do as they like too?"

And all of a sudden I began to see that I had been angry and quarrelsome just because I was not getting my own way as much as I wanted. The boys were working—working hard; but each of them had an idea of his own which seemed to him of the first importance, just as mine seemed most important to me. Aunt Isabel had wanted me to keep things running smoothly with the boys—to be the little peacemaker when anything like friction arose. And instead of that it was I who had provoked the first quarrel, and gone off in a huff to do nothing, because I could not get my own way!

How dreadful if I were going to have a sullen or naughty temper! I looked at Gordon, who kept his back turned resolutely towards me. He was working hard; but I could see he was vexed still. I did not feel at all disposed to go up and "eat humble pie" as the boys called it. I only sat still and felt rather horrid. And then again my eyes fell on the letters round the sun-dial—"Fugit hora—ora."

I looked down at Dimples ; she was asleep against my dress. I could not move without disturbing her—and besides Gordon or Cubbie might see me if I moved. I could not kneel down ; but I thought perhaps that did not matter too much. One of the old servants at Abbess Well, who had rheumatism very badly, never knelt down at prayers ; but Aunt Isabel had told me that "she knelt down in her spirit." I began to understand what that meant to-day as I clasped my hands together and bent my head over them and said—

"Please God help me to be good, and not to feel so cross. I want to be a peacemaker and not to make quarrels. Please help me."

Then almost directly Dimples woke up with a jump and said in a little shocked voice—

"O Polly, I've been so lazy ! Tell me what to do next ! I didn't mean to go to sleep !"

"You've only been to sleep a few minutes, darling, and you work splendidly. Dimples dear, do you think you and I together could carry down one of the big stones from that pile to Gordon ? They are better than what he has got."

"O yes, I'm sure we could ! I'm so very strong now. Gearge said so himself when he and I carried that garden seat across to the gazebo the other day !"

So picking out a fine large stone, Dimples and I bore it fairly easily down the slope to the place where Gordon toiled at his rockery, still with his back to me, and as we put it down I said—

“I’ve been thinking, Gordon, that now we have a real sun-dial for the middle, we shan’t want such a lot of big stones for the edges of the paths. Little ones will do just as well ; and the big ones will look better on your rockery ; and the ones that are too heavy to carry we can roll down to you ; and then you will get on much faster. See, we have brought you one to show you. Where shall we put it ?”

Then Gordon turned round, and his face was quite bright and merry again. For Gordon was never sulky. He could get very angry and storm, and even hit out ; but he was always ready to make it up again, and he took the big stone from us and set it up in a very good place and cried—

“How jolly of you, Polly ! I was thinking that myself, only I didn’t like to say it, in case it seemed greedy. But, I say, if you’ll let me have the big stones, and I get this rockery finished this week, next week I’ll help you with your sun-dial and paths ; but I’m awfully keen over this, because if Roger can get the water down, and we can make it all wet between the stones, I might find some

plants and ferns that would begin growing there ; and that would make something of a show.”

“ So it would. Yes, let’s finish the rockery first ; you’ve got on splendidly to-day, Gordon. Now, Dimples and I will roll you down the stones, and we’ll see how much we can do before it’s time to go home.”

It was really great fun when you began. Cubbie came and joined us soon, and it wasn’t a bit hard work making the stones roll down the slope to Gordon. There was a sort of mound at the bottom of our garden, where the yew tree roots had been heaved up when the storm threw them down and tore them up. So Gordon had not such very hard work to do. He had to get earth from the other side and pile it up, and mix it with the smaller stones, and then put the bigger ones in a rather more orderly way on the top. But he really did it very well. He let me help him, too, and suggest how they would look best ; and Cubbie brought him earth in a little box barrow we had found amongst the lumber, which was ever so much lighter than a real wheelbarrow.

By the time Roger came down from up above, we had made quite a show, and he stood with his hands in his pockets looking at it, and said—

" Go it, kiddies ! You've made a start this time."

" We've decided to work together and finish the rockery first, and then to get the water down," I explained, " so that things can grow. How are you getting on, Roger ? Is it coming soon ? "

" I'm digging out the channel first. Then we'll have to build a dam in a pool up there, and turn part of the stream into our channel. I'll show you by-and-bye. We must deepen the gully all down the side of the yew hedge there. It's not deep enough as it is ; the water would be running and slopping about everywhere. And then we'll run it into the basin at the corner, and find the other if we can, and see if we can make it fill them both, running amongst Gordon's stones till it gets there. I don't know quite if we can, because there isn't much slope there ; but we'll see. Anyway, there'll be the basin to water the rockery from ; and, you see, it faces north, so it ought to be cooler than the rest of the garden. Besides, Gearge says the nights will be getting cool soon, whatever the days are ; and that helps things to grow."

So we worked away all the rest of that week at the rockery, Roger leaving his work on Saturday to lend a hand. And that really was such a help that we got the whole thing finished to our

satisfaction by four o'clock, and stood looking at it with pride and delight.

We had been a whole week at our task now, and really we had done something. The place was not in quite such a jumble of stones and rubbish ; the mess along the bottom boundary was now transformed into a really fine-looking long rockery, which could be planted either with ferns or Alpine or other rock plants. We had marked out the line of the path, and had cleared it of loose stones and earth, which Gordon had used as we went along. If that path could have had some nice yellow gravel put down on it and rolled in, it would have looked fine ; and in imagination we saw that yellow gravel and admired it most heartily.

"We'll soon have the other paths cut out," cried Gordon, fired by enthusiasm, "and then we must see about the gravel, and how we can get it. The Squire said we might have it, you know ; but there'll be the drawing of it in."

"Tinker's Tim has got a donkey," said Cubbie, "I'm almost certain he'd let us have it. We should have to pay him something out of our money-boxes, I suppose ; but the Squire said he would pay us that back."

"And there's the turf to cut and bring along

too," said Roger, "we may want the donkey for that. But there's a lot of rather nice grass growing up on the hillside, only it's so long. But if we could cut it—"

"P'r'aps Tinker Tim's donkey would like to eat it," suggested Dimples; "wouldn't that make it short enough?"

"That's an idea!" said Roger; and, in fact, we were all so brim full of ideas that we could scarcely stop talking of them by day or by night!

We meant to earn that thirty pounds for Papa's sea-voyage, or perish in the attempt!

## CHAPTER VIII

### AN ALLY

"HALLO, mateys ! What be you up to there ? "

We were trying to drag the sun-dial and set it up in its place, when we heard this voice hailing us, and we all stopped short to look about us..

"It's Cocky !" cried Cubbie, pointing upwards.  
"See him grinning at us behind the gazebo ! "

Now Cocky, as we always called him, was a boy whom we partly liked and partly disliked. At first we had thought him horrid, because he had tried to cheat over cricket. But afterwards, when the boys had played on the green a good bit, they had got friendly with the blacksmith's son, who was the captain of the village team—if you could use such words—but who very willingly resigned his honours to Gordon, which, the boys said, was very decent of him.

Cocky was very strong, though at cricket he did not half know how to use his strength. We did not quite think he had any business here in the Squire's garden—and ours; but the sight of him was not altogether unwelcome just at this juncture.

Gordon paused and wiped the sweat from his brow.

"What are you doing there, Cocky?" he asked.

"Oi came to see what you was all a'ter! You've not come nigh the green this ever so long. Folks said as you were working in Squire's garden. My feyther is shoeing a horse down yonder, as Squire won't never have shod hot at the forge. I came along of he. Thought as happen you might have a job for I. Oi be strong and sprack, that a be!"

"Well, I don't know as you've any business here," said Gordon, in his rather lordly way; "but if you've come, you may make yourself useful. See here, we've got to put this sun-dial up, and it's pretty heavy; and you can lend a hand."

Cocky came leaping down with alacrity. He was as old as Gordon, but not so tall; only he was very broad and thick set, like the blacksmith, his father, and his weight made lifting and shoving easy to him.

We had got the pedestal of the dial into the

place we wanted ; but the pillar was heavier, and certainly it was a great help to have Cocky to direct operations. He had so often seen men lifting weights that he knew just the best way to set about it, and very soon, with a long and strong and concerted effort they heaved up the round pillar, and dropped it upon the strong iron spike which stood up from the pedestal. So there was the sun-dial set up in the centre of the garden, only wanting just its head with the dial, which any two of us could lift.

"O thank you, Cocky, that's fine !" I cried ; and I got hold of the dial and turned it round and round.

"How must we put it, to tell the time by ?"

That was a puzzle to us for a few minutes. Even Cocky scratched his head, and said as he didn't rightly know. But Roger, after thinking a minute, cried out—

"Why, it'll be twelve o'clock directly. We must set it so that the shadow falls right at twelve, and then it will be right for always ! "

"But its poor head will fall off !" said Dimples, as we lifted it upon its round column and began turning and twisting it about to see how to get the shadow to fall.

"Dang my buttons!" cried Cocky, who used to say very funny things which didn't sound quite nice, "but we must get some cement and fasten un on!"

"How can we get cement?" I asked.

But Cocky was off already, shouting back that he knew. He'd fetch it and do the trick. And when he was gone, we stood looking at one another.

"Do you think it's fair?" I asked the boys.

"What's fair!" asked Gordon quickly.

"I mean for Cocky to help us. Do you think the Squire would say it was fair?"

We looked at one another and Dimples remarked—

"Is it unfair than to have Tinker Tim's donkey?"

That made Roger laugh, though I did not quite know why. Certainly Cocky's coming had been very convenient that morning; but we didn't any of us want to do what was unfair.

"Shall me and Cubbie go and ask the Squire?" suggested Dimples, who was sometimes the boldest of any of us; and we thought that would be a capital plan.

"You mustn't tease him to say yes, if he says no, darling," I cautioned her, knowing her coaxing little ways, that so often earned her privileges

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denied at first. So she promised and trotted off with Cubbie quite happily in the direction of the house, and we sat down for a rest in the shade, and contemplated our handiwork with satisfaction and pride.

"It really does give it an air!" I remarked, and that was true. For we had pegged out some of the paths, and had made a sort of circle round the dial, where the turf was to go, when we could get any. I daresay to most people the place would have looked a perfect bear-garden still; but we saw it with the eyes of love, and clothed it with imaginary splendours.

Dimples and Cubbie returned hugely satisfied with themselves. Cubbie bore the load of fruit which never failed to find its way to us day by day.

"He says it's quite fair, if Cocky is a friend of ours, and comes to work with us because he likes it. I asked him if he didn't want dreadfully to come and see; but I wouldn't tell him what we'd done—only that it was going to be lovely! O, here's Cocky coming back! What's he got in that bucket? I fink it's rather nice to have Cocky to run about for us! It's so very hot!"

Cocky had brought some cement and a trowel; and we set to work with hearty good will to fix

the head of the dial. It was just noon then, so it was interesting to get the shadow just right. Roger did say something about the equinox being the properest time of all for setting dials ; but he thought this would do well enough. It was only a month from the equinox, and the sun would not change much.

We none of us quite understood, and Gordon said "Rot" and "Shut up, young wiseacre!" as he often did if Roger talked about things he did not understand. Roger always wanted to be an engineer, and he was interested in a lot of things that Gordon did not care about. Still it was very convenient, I thought, that he should have known about setting a sun-dial ; for we might have done it all anyhow. And if Cocky had not come just that morning, we should not have known about the cement ; and perhaps the head would have tumbled off some day and got broken, and that would have been a sad pity.

Altogether I felt that our handiwork was prospering mightily, and I was very pleased.

There was quite a lot of cement left, so we took it up to the gazebo, and mended up the walls there. We asked Cocky what could be done about the broken roof, and he looked up at it and scratched

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his head, as Gearge was wont to do when he was thinking.

There were still some beams and timbers overhead ; but it was all open to the sky ; and the holes were too big for us to see how we could stuff them up.

“ A few sheets of corrugated—that light sort—would do the trick,” he remarked, and we looked at one another wondering what “corrugated” could be.

“ Feyther has a lot of old rubbishy things like that stowed away behind the forge. Happen I moight lug out a few on un and barrow un up here ! Feyther’d let me have un, I reckon. He don’t never use yon old lumber ! ”

“ It would be lovely to mend the gazebo roof ! ” said Dimples softly. “ It hasn’t rained yet ; but if it did—it would be very messy in here ! ”

“ So ‘twould, missie, so ‘twould ! Rain ud just churn all this ‘ere stuff to mud ; and we do get powerful rains down these ‘hillsides, come the autumn. But I’ll see what I can do. Feyther, he won’t mind, if he knaws wheer it be a-comin’ to.”

“ We’ve got just a little money to pay for things,” said Roger, “ but not much. You must ask your father what he charges for his—what did you call it ?—corrugated ! ”

“ O, bless ‘ee, feyther won’t charge nothing for

yon old rubbidge ; he'll be glad to get it cleared out. It be full of holes too ; but we'd get fuzzy and stuff un up. O, we'll make a proper job of it. You trust I ! ”

Cocky certainly was very useful ; though his appetite at feeding time was prodigious. We had to ask him to share our meal ; and he seemed as though he'd eat everything we offered ; so by-and-bye we ceased to press him, in case there was not enough to go round. But the Squire's fruit always filled up the crevices, and we all had enough before we rose. But without doubt Cocky had had the lion's share, and as Gordon remarked with some satisfaction—

“ If we can't give him money, he enjoys his grub mightily, and eats enough for any two ! ”

Cocky was quite useful, too, about pegging out the paths. He could drive the pegs in better, and he thought just as I did, that the paths had better not be quite straight out to the corners, but have a nice little wiggle in them ; and by-and-bye the boys thought so too, after one had been pegged out, and some of the stones put down just to mark how it would look.

Then Roger said whilst we were about it, we had better make the circle round the sun-dial, where

the grass was to come. But making circles isn't at all easy, as you can tell for yourself if you take a pencil and paper and try. And it's much more difficult when it's a piece of ground you've got to draw on—and ground all rough and stony too.

But after we had been trying a good while, and finding always that we were wrong, Roger suddenly cried out—

"Why, if we had a piece of cord, we could do it as easy as easy!"

"I'll get one!" cried Cocky, and off he set, whilst we crowded round Roger and asked what he would do.

"Why, tie one end in a noose round the sun-dial, to be sure," he answered, "and then make a big knot for the size we want the grass to be all round the dial; and then we'll walk round putting in pegs every foot or so, and it's bound to be all right!"

And really it was! It was a splendid way of doing it. We got quite excited to see how beautifully the circle came out. The boys pushed in the pegs, and we followed with stones to put between just to make a show, and when we had worked quite round to the place we had started from, there was a lovely circle all round the sun-dial, and Cocky rubbed his hands with glee and said—

"I'll come along to-morrow, missie, and I'll dig he up foine all wheer the grass has got to grow ! I be a rare lad with the spade—even feyther says that. I'll dig un up proper, and smooth un down and rake un over. Then happen when it rains we'll get the turf. It'll be a proper foine garden—that a will ! "

Cocky was really very good-natured ; and he came next day with his own spade, which he said he liked better than the old one we had found in the tool-shed.

The boys had gone off to the dam ; and I'm quite sure Cocky would have liked better to join them there, for boys do love to make a mess with water. But instead of that, he stuck to his digging just as he said he would ; and it looked so nice to see the circle of rough hard ground getting nicely turned up, so that you felt you really could do something with it.

Cubbie stayed with us, and helped us to gather up the stones that kept being turned up by the pick or the spade. Cocky used both, and we admired the way he swung the pick very much. Cocky liked being admired, and hearing us say how strong he was—all boys do, I think. And of course it was a help to him to have us there to clear away the mess and rubbish as he worked. When the Squire's

fruit basket came up, and Cubbie went to take some of the plums to Gordon and Roger, Dimples and I made Cocky stop and sit in the shade ; and we began to talk to him, and Dimples suddenly asked,—

“ Cocky—do you ask God every day to prosper your handiwork ? ”

Cocky stared and I felt myself getting rather red. But Dimples finished her plum and then added gravely—

“ Because if you don’t I fink you’d better begin. Polly and I always do—and just look how we’re prospering ! ”

She waved her little hand towards the garden, where really things were beginning to look more ship-shape.

“ I fink perhaps it was God who sent you to help us, Cocky. I don’t fink either of the boys could have dug it all so nicely as you do ! ”

Cocky looked sheepish, and grinned gently, but attempted no reply. Dimples looked at him and said—

“ I suppose you always say your prayers, Cocky ? ”

“ I dunno about always, missie ; prayers seems things for old folks and church.”

“ Church prayers isn’t the same as our own at home,” Dimples told him. “ In church we have

to pray for everybody in the world. At home we think of the fings we want our own selves, what we want God to prosper for us."

I recognised in this piece of information an echo of Aunt Isabel's last Sunday afternoon lesson to us. Cocky looked impressed, and softly ejaculated, "Lawks a mussy!" I think he meant that he was surprised that Dimples knew so much about the matter. She pointed to the sun-dial and said—

"That little word you see written there, the littlest of all, means—pray. Polly told me it did. You'd better not forget your prayers, Cocky. You wouldn't like God to forget you, would you?"

Cocky seemed to think he had better take to his work again, which he did with great vigour. Dimples turned to me and asked—

"Do you fink that Cocky is a good boy?"

"I don't know, darling; he's been kind in helping us. But I don't think boys quite like talking about prayers and things. They get bored."

"I know. Gordon calls it 'holy-jaw.' I've heard him. But I would like Cocky to grow up a good man; and I don't fink God would quite like him to say all the words he does!"

Certainly Cocky did say strange things if taken by surprise. We had all noticed that. But he

was certainly making our handiwork prosper amazingly to-day ; and before we went home that afternoon, our circle round the dial had been nicely cut out and dug over and raked.

The boys came racing down as the clock chimed five, and they were quite impressed by the show made.

"O Jiminy ! that's fine !" cried Gordon. "I say, Cocky, how soon could one begin to turf it ? "

Cocky scratched his head after Gearge's fashion.

" Better wait for rain, I take it."

" All right !" cried Gordon, " that'll give us time to get on with the dam. Would you like to come to-morrow and help us up there, Cocky ? "

For Gordon had a shrewd eye for Cocky's power of work, and he didn't see why he should not be made use of.

" O dammy, yes, so I will !" cried Cocky, with a twinkle in his eyes. " You be a good pair at swearing, you young gen'lemen ! My feyther ud give I the strap ef I talked as you do ! " and Cocky grinned from ear to ear.

I did not quite understand ; but Gordon laughed first, and then said rather sharp—

" Don't you be a fool, Cocky ! And none of your cheek, remember ! " Which I thought rather

hard on Cocky, as he had been so kind to us and worked so hard.

"That's all very well," said Gordon, as we walked home together, after Cocky's path had diverged from ours. "But we can't have a lout like that taking liberties. He must keep his place, or I'll send him packing double quick. I'm not going to take any of his cheek, no fear! We can jolly well do without him if he tries that on, and if he's bumptious he'll be told so!"

"Well, don't you be too bumptious yourself," Roger advised. "Cocky'll be mighty useful the next little bit, if you and he don't get to loggerheads; but you're both so mighty fond of being cock of the walk; and one of these days you'll be fighting like cocks if you get to loggerheads."

"Well, it's not likely I'm going to stand cheek from fellows like that!" said Gordon, with his nose in the air. "Swearing, indeed! And talking about getting the strap! Awful cheek I call it!"

Dimples was walking on in front with Cubbie; but at this moment she turned round and said—

"I fink it would be nicer if you didn't quarrel with Cocky, Gordon; but tried to make him better. He's got no mother, and his father knocks him about a good deal. He said so. I fink we ought to be

kind to him, if he's naughty, and try and make him better!"

And when we were saying our prayers together that evening, Dimples suddenly took her chubby hands out of her eyes and looked round at me and said—

"I'm going to pray for Cocky, that he may be a good boy, that he may prosper too. Do you fink I may?"

And when Dimples was in bed, and I was sitting by the open window and looking out, as I loved to do before it was time for me to go to bed, I began to think that it was nice to pray for the people who did not properly pray for themselves. They must want it so much; and perhaps it would help them to be good. But I don't think I should ever have thought of praying for Cocky if Dimples had not thought of it first.

## CHAPTER IX

### LAVENDER, THE GANDER AND THE TINKER

"POLLY, do you fink it would be naughty if we didn't go with the boys to-day?"

Dimples said this coaxingly next Monday morning. It was the first time Dimples had ever made a suggestion on her own account.

"It's for the garden, Polly," she hastened to explain ; "but it isn't just in the garden. I fought perhaps you and I might go and see the old woman who has the lavender and yarb garden that Gearge talks about. I want<sup>o</sup> to have lavender and yarbs in my big bed by the gazebo."

By "yarbs" Gearge meant herbs, as I had already learned from Aunt Isabel ; but Dimples thought "yarbs" a nice name and did not care to change it. The gazebo, you see, did not take up the whole side of the top of the garden. It stood in the middle and looked down upon the

whole square ; and Dimples wanted to make two square beds on each side of it, with perhaps some tiny little paths across, and grow lavender on one side and "yarbs" on the other, or the sort of old-fashioned, sweet-scented things that the cottagers had in their gardens, and called by funny names that weren't in books.

"Why, yes, Dimples, why shouldn't we go ? The boys are so busy over the dam and the water that they can't think of anything else ; and we can't do much more without them. I wish we could dig out the paths ourselves ; but we can't. We've tried, and the ground is too hard. Cocky says it's sure to rain by-and-bye, and then digging will be a lot easier. So we might just as well go and see about getting some plants when we're ready for them ; and I want to settle something about the turf and the gravel. Cocky says there's plenty of both about, but we shall have to get somebody to 'draw' it for us. The Squire said something like that himself, you know."

"I'd like Tinker's Tim and his donkey to draw it," said Dimples. "I don't fink he would be so expensive as a big cart and horse ; and we haven't got very much money, have we, Polly ? "

"No, not very much ; but we may open our

money-box for it, because the Squire is going to pay us back. I wonder if Tim and his donkey would do——”

“ We can go and see after we’ve asked about the lavender,” said Dimples; “ they both live on the other side of the common, and not very far apart. Cocky told us all about it, you know. I wonder why he called her Old Mother Goose. He said we’d know when we got to her cottage.”

The boys were quite content to troop off alone. We said perhaps we should come and see them presently. But for several days there had not been much for us to do except cut the yew hedges, and that was very hard work, though Cocky had shown us a better way of doing it, and got us a better tool to work with. But the big shears made our hands very tired, and the twigs were very tough to cut. Still we were getting on slowly as far as we could reach; and sometimes when Cocky or one of the big boys took a turn at it, we saw quite a difference in quite a little while.

But it was not very interesting work, though both Dimples and I tried to be persevering over it, and Cubbie was really very good, and worked at it a great deal every day. So it was rather nice to feel that for once we could still be helping on the garden,

without exactly working in it. It was just the sort of day when a walk was delicious, and we started off in great spirits to find the old blind woman who had the lavender bushes and the "yarbs."

There were boys playing cricket on the common, as we crossed that part of it which formed the village green. Beyond it was much wilder, with gorse and heather growing all over it ; the little "needle-gorse," as well as the big bushy sort which does not bloom so well in autumn as in spring. The needle-gorse comes out with the heather, and all the common was purple and gold—almost like a carpet. There were clumps of trees dotted about too, which made it prettier than most commons, and there was another pond, too, where geese swam about, unless they were waddling on land and eating grass. Bob drove these into the water when they came and hissed at us. Dimples held my hand tight and said—

"I'm not really afraid of them ; but if they pecked my legs I should not much like it, and they do make a very funny noise when they hold out their necks all stiff and straight. I'm rather glad Bob sends them into the water. They look prettiest there."

We soon saw the thatched roof of the old woman's cottage. It looked so picturesque, all smothered in

roses and that pretty wild clematis they call "traveller's joy," which is as pretty in the autumn with its feathery sort of fluff as it is when the flowers are in bloom. There was quite a big garden all round the cottage, rather tangled and wild, but smelling so sweet that we both began to sniff.

"Lavender!" said Dimples. "Just delicious! And lots of other nice smells too. There's the gate, Polly! Let's go in and find the old woman. I fink I see her sitting in her doorway. O!"

Dimples might well say "O!" For as we unlatched the gate and looked up the path we saw something very funny indeed. The old woman was sitting in her chair, and doing something with a pile of lavender stalks on a little table before her. But what was so very funny was that a big goose (at least, he was really a gander) stood beside her; and when the gander heard the click of the latch, he came waddling down the path, and when he saw Bob and us, he began to hiss, and stretched out his neck, just as though he meant to drive us away.

"O Polly—do you fink he'll peck my legs!"

I put Dimples behind me, and let Bob stand in front, and then I called out and said—

"Please, Mother Goose, may we come and see you?"

I'd forgotten that perhaps this was not really her right name ; but she did not seem to mind. Though she could not see us, I knew (for Cocky had told us she was blind), she seemed to be smiling at us quite kindly ; and she made a funny sort of whistling noise ; and when the gander heard it he stopped hissing, and turned back and went up the path again till he got to the old woman. And she took him round the neck and held him, and said—

" Come on, my dearies, Gandy shall not hurt you ! He's not got a very pretty way of talking ; but he won't do any harm so long as I be here to see to un."

Then we walked up the path, amongst all the nice smells, and the blind woman must have been very clever, for she said almost directly—before I had properly explained anything—

" Happen you be some of the little folks from Abbess Well. And kindly welcome ye be ! "

Then we began telling her<sup>4</sup> about the garden, and all we wanted to do ; at least I did most of the telling, whilst Dimples stood very close to the big gander, and began gently and half timidly stroking his soft feathers. He turned his head right round to look at her with his small beady eyes, and she said with a little gasp—

" O please—does it ever come off ? "

It really looked as though it might ; but it never did ; though I knew that Dimples was thinking of a favourite doll of ours whose head used to turn right round, till one day it fell off, and all the sawdust came out, and there had to be a funeral in the garden. But the old woman said that the gander's head was quite safe, which relieved Dimples, as he certainly seemed doing his best for some time to try to screw it off.

"Please tell us how you got him !" Dimples begged.

"For sure, for sure I will, lovey," was the kind answer. "There's many folks asks me the story of Gandy, seeing him and me go about together always. Well, you see, it was this way. There was a grey goose on the common yonder as made her nest and sat, and seemed like to hatch out her brood. I had the sight of my eyes in those days, and I watched her and wondered<sup>o</sup> how many she'd hatch and rear. But so soon as the first egg hatched, what did the silly mother goose do, but waddle off with it, as proud as you like, leaving all the rest of the eggs to addle, if so be as I hadn't chanced to see her do it, and had a big cochin china hen broody at the time, who would mostly sit on anything like an egg."

"And did you give her the other little gooses to hatch?" asked Dimples eagerly.

"Yes, my dear, I did; and she brought them off too, and was a good mother to them, till they took to the water and left her. But as for the other little gosling, before many days had gone by a big strange dog crossing the common was attacked by the mother goose, she being fierce as they are when they've got babies waddling after them. And the dog he turned on her and killed her; and the poor little gosling was left all alone—and it was a sight to see it walking round and round its dead mother, wondering why she didn't get up again."

Dimples' eyes were round with interest.

"O, and what did it do? The poor little thing!"

"Well, of course, I thought that I would take it to old Betty, to rear up along with the rest of the little goslings. I couldn't see no difference in them, and never thought as she would either. But there—you never can tell. She wouldn't look at it—wouldn't have it near her. She pecked it so fierce that it ran away in a fright. And I had to see what I could do, and I brought it up myself, and it soon followed me about everywhere I went—just like a dog—indoors and out. Folks said they'd never seen such a thing. And when my good

man, as is dead and gone now, came home of a night from his work, Gandy would flutter up on to his knee, and sit there as happy as a king. And when he took the fever that carried him off—my good man I mean—you should have seen how that there bird fretted for un. And when I took ill after we'd buried un—they do say as nothing wouldn't keep Gandy out of my room, and that if ever I called and nobody came, he'd set up such a commotion as brought one of the neighbours flying, knowing well what he meant."

"Then he took care of you really and truly?"

"That he did, lovey, and he does still. For when I got up again the sight of my eyes was going fast, and now it's quite gone; but Gandy, he goes everywhere with me, and keeps me safe. I'm not afeard crossing the common nor nothing so long as I have <sup>he</sup> by me. He minds all I say like a Christian he do. And now he knows as you won't harm me, nor your dog neither, he won't do you no manner of hurt!"

"He's a dear goosey-goosey gander," said Dimples. "I would like to kiss him, only he twists his head about so very funnily, I don't quite know how to do it."

Then whilst Dimples made advances to the gander,

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I told the dame more about our garden, and how we had come to ask her about getting lavender for it, and "yarbs" and things like that ; and she was so interested, and got her stick and took us round her garden, and showed us the little lavender bushes growing, that had been only "cuttings" this time last year. She showed us this summer's cuttings in pots and boxes standing in the window, and explained that these would be dear little bushes another summer, like the ones she had growing in her garden now, in a little plantation by themselves. Some of her big bushes were years and years old ; but these would not move. It was the little ones that she said we might have "and welcome" as soon as the rain came, and we had a nice bit of damp ground ready for them. And she showed us rosemary and thyme and marjoram and southernwood and all sorts of "yarbs," the names of which I did not know and could scarcely remember afterwards. And she promised us bits of everything ; and explained to us how we were to plant them. And we had a lovely time in that garden, and Dimples did not know which she liked best, when at last we went away, the old woman or the big gander.

"They're both so nice—one doesn't know how

to choose ; but I fink the gander's the prettiest. He has *such* soft feathers ! ”

“ It's going to be very interesting, Dimples, as soon as ever it rains,” I said. “ I never understood before quite how nice rain was. I used to think people didn't like it ; but Mother Goose says she loves to hear it fall after a long hot spell ; and that it makes her garden smell twice as nice as even it did to-day.”

We had got almost across the common, and were getting near a piece of wood where we knew that Tinker's Tim lived, when suddenly Bob began to growl, and then he gave an angry bark, and just at the same time we heard the sound of a cry—as though somebody was being frightened or hurt.

“ O Polly, what is it ? ” cried Dimples.

I couldn't tell her ; and we stopped, half afraid to go on, and then in a minute we saw something, a little black donkey came running out into the open, and a man was holding it by its halter, though he couldn't stop it, and was whacking it cruelly with a thick stick ; and a little boy rushed after them crying and holding his arm, as though he had been hurt, but shouting to the man to stop ; and I'm afraid that both of them were using very bad words.

I was just going to get hold of Dimples' hand and

run away with her, when suddenly she rushed forward towards the wicked man who was belabouring the donkey. And Bob, who was always very much excited and upset if he saw any beating going on, rushed at him too, growling and barking ; and when the man saw Bob coming at him like that, he stopped beating the poor donkey, and held his stick as though he would hit Bob if he came too near.

" You're a very naughty, cruel man ! " cried Dimples, as bold as a little lion. " You've hurt your poor dear donkey dreadfully ; and I believe you've hurt Tim as well. If you don't take care they'll put you in prison. A man in London, where we come from, was sent to prison once for being cruel to his little boy and his dog. You'd better take care ! "

I thought the man would surely turn on Dimples next, but he didn't. He stared at her ; and she stared back at him ; and then he suddenly dropped the halter and shambled away back to his hut, that we could just see through the trees. He growled out something at Tim as he passed, and Tim made a hideous face at him. Perhaps that was not quite nice of Tim, as it was his own father ; but then the Tinker was a dreadful man. Nobody could be very fond of him, I thought.

The donkey began to graze the grass at once, Tim came slowly up, the curious scowling look on his face giving way as he got nearer to his merry smile.

"Ain't her a rare plucked little un, to go for feyther like that! He's a bin in prison ever so many times—I wish they'd keep he in longer whilst they're about it—so I do. Neddy and I can do rarely well alone, so us can. It's when he's about as it's so mortal bad for we."

"But he's your father, Tim. I don't fink you ought to want him to be in prison."

"I guess he's best off there, missie, kept out of mischief, you see. He's always in liquor when he's loose, and then he wallops Neddy and I. He'd break every bone in our skin as soon as look at us, and then where'd we be? And Neddy belongs to I, not to he. The gipsies gived him me when he was a baby, and they thought he'd die. I've done everything for Neddy, I have. He's no call to lay a finger on he. One of these days I'll——"

Tim's face wore such an ugly black look, and I was so sure he was going to say some more bad words, that I hastened to tell him our errand, and to ask him if he and Neddy could some day help us with our carting work, and how much he

would charge. Tim's face lighted up eagerly at this. He knew all about where the gravel could be got, and he had a little cart which Neddy drew, or if the ground was too rough, he could fill two panniers, and bring the gravel that way to us, and we could get it put down nicely as he was fetching the next load; one of the gravel pits being only a little farther up the hill than the limits of the Squire's garden, all would be easy.

Tim knew the place quite well, and explained farther—

"There were a big wall once, as shut it off, but it were carried away in the storm I've heerd tell on. That's what made such a power of mess and rubbidge theer. But 'twill be easy work bringing gravel down the hill. Neddy 'll be proud to do it," and then we discussed terms, and Tim suggested sixpence a day and his dinner; which was certainly a modest asking for the pair of them; and we closed with the offer at once, as we saw that Tim was very keen after the job, and we did not think that anybody would do it for less.

He told us also that he could cut turf "foin and well." He even took us to an old shed where lumber was piled, and raked out a very ancient turfing iron, which he showed us how to use. Indeed,

Tim seemed as though he might be a very useful sort of boy ; only I remembered how Cocky had refused to let him play cricket with the other boys because he was a "hang-gallus," and we rather wondered what might happen if Cocky and Tim were to meet in the garden.

However, Tim was not wanted there just at present ; and perhaps Cocky would not remain on after the matter of the water was settled. We need not do what Aunt Susanna called—"Cross bridges before we came to them."

Dimples trotted homewards very soberly beside me.

"Polly," she said, "I like Tinker's Tim very much, because he loves his Neddy, and he tries so hard to make his own living. But—but—do you fink he is quite a *good* boy ?"

I knew what Dimples meant ; but I thought in Tim's case, at any rate, there were extenuating circumstances.

"I'm afraid nobody has tried to teach him to be good, Dimples, darling."

She looked up into my face with the sweetest and most confiding glance.

"Could you teach him, do you fink, Polly ?"

"I'm afraid I don't know how," I answered.

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Dimples heaved a big sigh ; but then brightened up.

"Then we shall have to ask God to teach him," she remarked, "'cause Aunt Isabel says that God knows everything."

## CHAPTER X

### TRIUMPH—AND AFTERWARDS

IT was a most exciting moment! We were all posted in different places to watch the result. For Roger's engineering operations at the brook above were all complete, and they were to-day to break away the partition wall between our gully and the pool which had been deepened by the dam, and to see whether we could get a little stream of our own running through our garden, and irrigating the rockery, so that ferns could grow there nicely.

I had not had very much to do with the water-works, but I very well understood how delightful it would be to have water through our garden. The channel, which ran down in a wiggly sort of way near to one of the yew hedges, had been dug a good deal deeper. Roger said he could see that

water had channelled it pretty often before, in the winter rains most likely, so that it had not been very hard work to scoop it out. Then we had the two old fountain basins, one at each end of the rockery. We had mended the broken one with cement, so that it would hold water, and the other one which Gearge brought us later was not broken; but only wanted its hole stopping up at the bottom.

The thing we were most excited about was to know whether the water would run along by the rockery to the second basin, for the ground did not slope much there, and though we had cut a little trench all along, we were not quite sure how it would act. But at any rate one end of the rockery would certainly get nicely wetted, and as Gordon said, the water would make the air cool and damp, so that ferns and things would like living there.

I asked Roger once what would happen to the water after it had filled our second basin, if ever it got as far; and he had looked a little doubtful, I thought, as he said—

“ Cocky is certain it will run down hill and join the stream again somewhere. I wanted to dig it a channel; but Gordon says it’s too much grind; and Cocky is cock-sure it’ll get sucked away in

somehow. I suppose he ought to know best. I daresay it'll be all right ; but if I'd had my way——”

However, Roger had not had his way ; the other two had overborne him, and the water we were to secure for the adornment and irrigation of our garden was afterwards to take its chance of finding its way back to the main channel.

On the morning when the experiment was to be made, we were all far too much excited to see what the result would be upon our garden to weigh any after consequences. Dimples and I were stationed in the garden itself ; Cubbie was to watch by a certain corner, where Roger was afraid the water might possibly make a flying leap and be deflected from our channel ; and he, with Gordon and Cocky, went up to the pool above, where the great engineering operations had been carried on, and which was to act as the reservoir for our supply.

Before this I had heard some heated arguments between the boys on the subject of “sluice-gates.” I did not know at all what sluice-gates were ; but I understood that Roger wanted to have one, though it would mean a lot of extra trouble, and he confessed he did not quite know how he should get one into working order ; whilst the other two boys declared there was no need for any such

"rotten foolery." A hole cut through would do the trick just as well; for when once the water was running, we should never want to turn it off.

And now, as I understood the matter from what had been shown and told me, the boys were going to dig down the last little dividing wall of earth which separated our artificial channel from the pool, through which the brook ran brawling and tumbling, as it leaped down from the higher ground above. And this pool, having been deepened at our end by the dam the boys had made, would have quite enough water in it to give us plenty for our garden stream. At least, that was what we hoped and Roger was confident of. We were all tremendously excited about it, and Dimples kept dancing to and fro, and looking up at the higher ground above, where the boys were at work out of sight, and she kept saying—

"O Polly, when is the water coming? When is the water coming? O, how splendid, to have a river in our garden! Won't the Squire be pleased! Won't he be surprised? And won't it be nice when we can water our flowers?"

The flowers existed at present only in our own imaginations; but we saw them so plainly that it was almost to us as though they were there.

Suddenly a big shout from above told us that something had been done, and our hearts were in our mouths as we waited and watched. Then we heard a yell from Cubbie—

“It’s coming! It’s coming! It’s come!” he shrieked. “O, it’s all right—it’s all right! It did leap over just a moment; but it’s all right now. Hurrah! Hurroosh!”

The next minute it was our turn to scream out! Here came the water, tumbling and foaming down its narrow gully! Down it came, overflowing in places, leaping and hopping and tumbling about in the most exciting and delightful way.

Dimples fairly shrieked as she rushed along towards the lower basin.

“It’s full! It’s full! It’s overflowing!” she cried, and sure enough it was, brimming over and running out on all sides. Some ran along the little channel towards the other basin, but only quite slowly and gradually. The rest went meandering downwards somewhere, and seemed to be sucked up by the thirsty ground as fast as it reached it.

We eagerly watched the little runnel creeping along the base of the rockery. We tried to help it along with our hands and our trowel. It did move; but so slowly. Still, foot by foot, it was

crawling along, and by the time the boys came down, hot and triumphant, it had just reached the second basin, and was very slowly filling it.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Now we've got water for everything! We can plant our ferns directly, and do—O, ever such a lot! We could almost begin to turf now, couldn't we? We could water the grass every day—that would be as good as if it rained!"

We were all in high feather. Our little brook was now running merrily and steadily. Roger had arranged little steps in the channel, so that it might look like tiny cascades as it came tumbling down. Dimples clapped her hands, and knelt down and dabbled them in the water, and then tasted it.

"It's just delicious!" she declared. "Ever so much nicer than what we get in the pool!"

And that made us all laugh; for really it was just the same water, and I don't think it was quite so clean either, for, of course, just at first it was bringing down a good deal more sand and gravel and earth than it would do later on when the channel had been well washed out and cleansed. Roger declared that gradually it would hollow itself out a rather wider gully and look quite a feature in the garden. We thought it feature enough as it was, and were hugely triumphant.

"You are clever, Roger," I told him admiringly; "the water was all your idea!"

Roger was very pleased, I saw; yet he was not quite as satisfied as we were. He kept going to look at that brimming over basin in the corner and once I heard him say—

"We ought to have had an overflow here, and made a channel back to the stream; that would have made everything shipshape. Only you fellows were in such a confounded hurry. But I daresay it's all right. I must find out sometime how it works back to its channel."

By this time we were all famishing, and Roger was called upon to wait till after our meal for anything more he might want. We went up to the gazebo to picnic, as we always did, and a very merry meal we were having, when we suddenly heard a quite unusual sound—men rushing towards us, men calling out to one another, seeming to be excited and vexed and astonished at something. Roger sprang to his feet, and I saw an odd look on his face.

"Something's happening about that water!" he cried. "Now why in thunder didn't you fellows let us make a sluice-gate? then we could have turned it off!"

I did not properly understand what Roger meant;

but we very soon knew that something was wrong. It was our friend Gearge who first reached us. He came as a sort of scout, to give us warning. The other voices were on the other side of the hedge outside our garden. It was only Gearge who reached us panting out—

“Dang my buttons, if Oi didn’t know it. It’s you’ve abin bringing of the stream down upon we ! ”

“O Gearge ! but we’ve only brought it through our garden, for the fountains, you know ! ”

“O, ay, the fountains ! But look ‘ee here, misters, you’ve abin and drownded out Squire’s stoke hole for the vineries and peach-houses. A foine to-do theer be down yonder ! Mr. Miles, he be swearing fit to bust hisself ! Oi tell you if ‘twere winter time, when the furnace be alight — golly ! he’d be like to wring your necks for the lot of you. A foin lot of mischief as you’d ‘a’ done then ! ”

We gazed at one another in mute dismay. Roger sprang up and made a rush after the men who had passed on their way up the hill. They had not yet discovered the cause of the miniature flood below ; but they would do so very quickly now, we knew.

And quickly indeed they did ! We heard great

noises of shouting and calling ; and in what seemed a very few minutes, Cubbie, who had also run out, came back with a very woe-begone face and told us,

“ The water isn’t running any more. It’s all gone ! ”

And true enough it was. Not a drop remained to tell of our recent triumphs. Cocky sat looking rather stupid, and on Gordon’s brow blackness was gathering. Suddenly he started up and cried out to Cocky—

“ Come along, and let’s have cricket again on the green. I’m sick to death of this beastly garden, nothing but grind, and then—this ! ”

Cocky sprang up with alacrity. I had seen for some days that only the excitement of messing about with the water kept him to our service—that and the good victuals and the Squire’s basket of fruit.

“ Let’s be gone quick ! ” he cried with eagerness. “ Mr. Miles, he may be coming along up, maybe. We’d best be gone afore that ! Cricket’s a deal more fun than this kind of thing. Drattle it all ! Come on ! ”

Cocky had started down the hill at a run ; Gordon was just hurrying into his coat when I caught his arm.

"But, Gordon, Gordon! we mustn't give up! If we do we shan't get anything! O Gordon, think! That thirty pounds! Papa—Mamma!"

"What's the good of trying to do things, if somebody comes and spoils your work and ruins everything? It's just beastly! I won't stand it! I'm off!"

And Gordon, who was very angry indeed, I could see, leaped down after Cocky, and we heard them running down the hillside till their steps were lost in the distance.

"Dang my buttons!" whistled Gearge again, and he stood scratching his head and looking mightily perplexed.

Dimples had subsided in a little heap and was crying. I could almost have followed her example. Things had all been going so well up till now; and just to-day, when we thought we had scored a real triumph, Dame Fortune seemed quite to have turned her face the other way. Things seemed to have come to a deadlock. Gordon had been disgusted and had gone. I knew how horribly disappointed Roger would be; for this was his pet scheme. He was awfully keen over the water part, and I knew by the sudden stopping of the supply that something must have been done up

by the dam, which probably spoilt his plans. It was horribly disappointing ; for days were so precious ; and Dimples was sobbing out—

“ I don’t call—this—pros-prospering—our handi-work ! Naughty—naughty men ! They want whipping ! ”

Roger was quite a long time gone ; but at last he came back with a very grave face ; but he did not look angry ; indeed, there was a rather eager sort of look in his eyes, I thought, and he only asked at first—

“ Where’s Gordon—and Cocky ? ”

“ Gone to play cricket,” answered Cubbie. “ Gordon’s in a big rage. I don’t think he’s coming back to the garden any more ! ”

Dimples howled afresh at this ; but Roger remarked—

“ Well, I don’t care if he doesn’t—for a bit. As for that Cocky chap, I’d like to thrash him ! He wouldn’t listen to sense, and he made Gordon take his part, because that made two to one, and I had to give in. But if I do it alone, I’ll do it my own way. Then it’ll all come right, you’ll see ! ”

“ O Roger, then you’re not going to give up ? ”

“ Give up ? Rather not ! We’ll make a good job of it this time, too. I’ve had Miles up—— ”

"Bless me! You don't mean as Mr. Miles have abin and talked to you?" gasped Gearge, looking awed.

"O, yes, he has. I've explained it all to him. He was very decent about it when he really understood. He'll come down here presently, and see our garden too. It was simply idiotic of us not to make a sluice, as I said; and worse still not to have a backwater for the channel, to carry it back to the brook. But that Cocky chap, he is so beastly coxy—thinks he knows such a fat lot about everything——"

Gearge suddenly smote upon his thigh.

"Oi'll help you, Master Roger, that Oi will! Ef Mr. Miles won't spare I by day, Oi'll come after hours. I be a bit of a gawny, but I can work! You try Oi and see! Don't ee cry, little missie! We'll get un to roights one of these days, that us will! You see!"

"That would be fine, Gearge, if you could come and lend a hand!" cried Roger, brightening up. "Gordon can have his spell of cricket if he wants. We'll do better without him perhaps. He's always in such a tearing hurry——"

"But didn't they spoil everything up there, Roger? They've stopped the water from coming."

"I know ; but that's not so bad as if they'd meddled with the dam. They would have done if I hadn't got there in time. They thought some poacher chaps must have been meddling and messing. But when I explained they were quite decent. But they said the water had run down and filled the stoke hole of the vineyery. That put them out a goodish bit. They had to choke up our stream. But I can get that open all right when I want ; but first I shall make a sort of sluice in the channel. Miles said that a gate to draw up and down would be the best, not to try to open or shut it against the stream. I'm going to have a talk to some carpenter about it ; but I shall make it myself. And if you and Gearge can get the backwater dug out whilst I'm making the gate——"

"Us can do that foine !" cried Gearge, grinning from ear to ear ; "just you show Oi where 'tis to be, you shan't have no more trouble about that. You leave that to Oi ! "

Dimples now began drying her tears. After all, everything was not spoiled. She was rather awed when the head gardener appeared a few minutes later, and stood looking about him stroking his chin and smiling a little. But she plucked up her courage, and began to do the honours of the garden

very prettily, explaining (and it needed some explanation) which were paths and where the roses were, and the lavender and the "yarbs," and how there was a beautiful fernery all along the bottom, only some naughty men had been very rude about the water, and of course everybody knew that the poor dear ferns must have water to make them grow.

"And so must our little round lawn," she added, "and you can see how pretty that is going to be. Roger has got us the water most beautifully; and now somebody's stopped it all." Dimples came to a sudden stop, and then added very gravely, "I shall have to tell God about that to-night; because He's been prospering our handiwork so very nicely; and I fink He will be very seriously annoyed with somebody about it!"

Miles continued to rub his chin and his mouth as he looked about him; and his eyes were kindly in their expression, which of course was nice of them, for naturally he had been a good deal vexed by having his stoke hole and furnace flooded out.

"Who planned all this out, little missie?" he asked, looking at me.

"Well, we looked at pictures, and I wanted the sun-dial in the ring of green, with paths and beds

between, and one of my brothers thought of the rockery, or Alpine garden, only it's easier to get ferns than Alpine plants ; and Roger thought of the water to make it prettier and keep things growing. We all have ideas, and work in turns at them——”

“ I'm going to have lavender and ‘yarbs’ up here,” said Dimples, “ and the nice old blind goose-woman is going to give us lots. She's promised.”

“ And who's going to give the roses for these beds you've marked out between the paths ? ”

“ Aunt Isabel has some little wee plants and some roses she rooted last year—all in a row under the wall. She says we may have a good many of them. We shall go out collecting. We may get things out of the woods perhaps to fill up. We shall want all we can get, I know.”

“ When you go out collecting, then, you can come and see me. I'll be having a good deal of thinning and moving going on before long. There's always a deal to be thrown away such times. Maybe you'll find you don't have such a deal of trouble filling up your beds ! ”

We looked at each other, and we looked at our new friend. After all, things were not turning out as badly as we feared.

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As Dimples neared home that evening she looked up at me and said—

“I don’t fink God will be annoyed with that nice man. I shall tell him I don’t fink it was his fault that we didn’t prosper properly to-day.”

## CHAPTER XI

### QUARRENDENS

GORDON would not hear a word about the garden when he came home to tea. He was in a very funny mood, angry with everybody and quarrelsome; yet without any cause, because what had happened had not been any fault of ours.

Dimples tried to explain to him that things were going to come right again; but he would not listen. He said he was "tired of fooling," and that the garden could "go to pot" for all he cared. It was no good trying to do anything if a parcel of louts was allowed to spoil it all. He was going to play in a cricket match for Crickle Abbot against a team coming over from another village soon. He had promised that afternoon, and he must practise pretty hard, as he had lost several weeks already. He advised Roger to do the same. I was miserable till I had heard Roger's answer.

"But, Gordon, if you go away," said Cubbie, "how can we ever get the garden finished?"

"We never shall get it finished anyhow," he snapped, "and I'm sick to death of it!"

"But the fifty pounds, Gordon!" said Dimples.

"Hang the thirty pounds! That's all rot! He'll never give it to us. It's just a hoax!"

Dimples' eyes were round with wonder. She looked at me and asked helplessly—

"What *does* Gordon mean?"

Roger looked across to answer rather smartly—

"He means that he's tired of working himself, and so he wants other people to be tired too, and give up because he's going to give up. But the rest of us mean to have that thirty pounds for Papa, whatever Gordon does."

Then there was a quarrel, as I knew there would be. It had been simmering in the air all the time. I got Dimples away to bed; because we both hated it when the boys quarrelled like that. Roger could say horrid things when he chose, and Gordon would fly into great passions. It was such a pity, too, because we had really been such friends over the garden, and I was quite, quite sure that the Squire would not deceive us about the thirty pounds; and I did so want that he should be pleased with

what we'd done. Yet if Gordon left off working, it would make a great difference. Only, of course, if Gearge really might help us sometimes, he was much stronger even than Gordon.

Cubbie joined us by-and-bye looking rather scared.

"Roger says he'll knock Cocky down next time he sees him, and won't let him come near the garden again, even if he wants. Gordon says he said he knew all the time that there'd be a row about the water in the Squire's garden. Roger is furious. He says Cocky is a brute and wants thrashing. Gordon says he's a jolly chap, and shan't be touched!"

It was all very tiresome, and next morning there was still thunder in the air. The two big boys would not speak to each other; and Gordon made off directly breakfast was over, and said he shouldn't be back till tea-time. But as he wasn't coming with us, I thought he ought to ask leave about going out for the day; but he wouldn't listen, and off he went, and Roger remarked before he was out of hearing—

"A good riddance of bad rubbish!" which perhaps was not quite nice of him; for Gordon had really worked as hard as any of us all these weeks.

"I don't see that you girls can be much use over

there to-day," Roger said; "the Cub and I can work a bit, and at ten I must go and see some carpenter about the gate, after we've taken measurements and all that. Perhaps you'd better see that chap with the donkey. We might be getting some of the gravel in, even though we don't lay it down yet."

And then, just as he was going, he added—

"I expect I shall want some money for these gates. One can't ask to have the wood for nothing, and he'll have to show me how to do the trick; though I mean to do it myself. I suppose we must take it out of the money-box!"

The money-box would come open with a good shake, as we all knew. But we never did shake it except by common consent, and for some legitimate purpose. When any of us had any money to put in, it was wrapped in paper with a big letter marked outside, G for Gordon, R for Roger, and so on, so that everybody knew what was his or her share. We thought that was the fairest way; and now, when we had shaken the box, we sorted out the little packets; but to our surprise there was not one with a G on it. Yet Gordon, being the eldest, generally had rather the most money.

It was Roger who first grasped what had happened.

"He's gone and taken all his money out to get himself a new bat!"

We all knew that Gordon wanted a new bat rather badly, especially if he were going to play in a match; and if he had said anything about it to us we should not have minded—not very much at least—though just now we did want our money rather badly. But it didn't seem quite nice for him to have gone to the money-box like this, without a word to any of us. Probably it was after his quarrel with Roger last night that it happened. When Gordon was angry he would do anything, though afterwards he was often horribly sorry. But then, he would have spent the money and got the bat, and there would be nothing of his share left for the garden; and even Roger was going to take some of his away; though that was for the garden too, only we had not expected it to be wanted.

Aunt Isabel's voice was heard calling us at that moment. We ran down to her quickly; only Roger making off and telling Cubbie to follow as quickly as he could.

Aunt Isabel was in her garden apron and gloves. She had a big basket over her arm.

"I am going to pick quarrendens," she said; "do you little people want any to take away with you?"

Cubbie eagerly filled his pockets and ran after Roger. Dimples and I lingered and asked—  
“Can’t we help you, Aunt Isabel ? ”

“Well, my dear, you could, if you’re not too busy.” And as we followed her to the orchard, she said, “I was wondering if you would like to change your ribstone pippin tree for one of quatrendens, as they come ripe so much earlier, just when little folks find fruit so extra nice ! ”

“O, may we, Aunt Isabel ? ”

“To be sure you may, my dears. I think it would be best for both of us. I will show you which tree you shall have. It is quite as big as the ribstone, and better covered with fruit this year.”

We were enchanted with the tree with its ruddy crop. The apples were simply delicious, and there was such a lot of them top ! We helped Aunt Isabel to gather her basket full, and when she had gone away, after assuring us that our tree was our very own, and that we could do what we pleased with the fruit, I turned upon Dimples and said—

“We must sell it, darling ! And get money for the garden ! That’s what we must do.”

“O Polly ! How splendid ! But how can we sell it ? We haven’t got a shop.”

Certainly this was a little bit of a puzzle ; but I was not going to be nonplussed.

" We must sell it to people who have shops then."

" Where ? " asked Dimples ; and that was another puzzling one, for I did not think the village shops would do much trade in apples, in a place where everybody had their own orchards.

" In London they would have bought them directly at the shops and sold them in penny bags—we used to buy them like that ; do you remember, darling ? "

" Let us sell them in penny bags ! " said Dimples.

It was an idea ! There was a certain fascination in picturing ourselves going about with our apples, and disposing of them like that ; but I began to wonder what the aunts would say if they were to see us doing it. And then, apples were heavy. We could not carry a big basket far—

" Polly," suddenly began Dimples again, " if we had Tinker Tim's donkey, we could carry a lot ! He carries things in baskets one on each side. I've seen him. It would be so nice selling our apples like that. I wonder if he would lend us his Neddy ! "

" I'll tell you what he might do, darling. Tim might sell our apples for us himself, and then the money would pay for him and the donkey when

we wanted to use them. I expect Tim knows much better how to sell things than we do. Shall we go and ask him?"

We set off forthwith. Dimples evidently felt that this method was lacking in the attractions of the other; but she was used to submitting her judgment to mine. I felt that my courage would not be sufficient to enable me to ask Aunt Susanna's leave to go out with a donkey selling pennyworths of apples at cottages and houses; and without her leave, of course, we could not do it. But Tim could go; and I did not think he would cheat us. Only I knew we should have to be careful that his dreadful drunken father did not get hold of the money, as no doubt he would if he could.

Fortune favoured us that day, for we had not got far away from home in the direction of the common, before we saw Tim and his donkey coming towards us, and Tim was whistling joyously at the top of his voice and cheering on Neddy with his pipe, and with friendly smacks with his open palm.

Yet when we got a little nearer we saw that poor Tim had a dreadful black eye, and that his lip was cut and swollen, and his clothes looked more torn about and ragged than ever. But in spite of this his eyes were dancing in his head, and when

he pulled his forelock to us—he never had cap or hat—he was smiling all over his face, and not a bit of the black sullenness was to be seen to-day.

"O Tim, what is the matter?" cried Dimples, "your poor, *poor* face!"

Tim lifted his hand a moment to his eye, and then he laughed again.

"It don't matter nohow. He did knock I about terrible t'other night, so he did. But he be gone now! He'll be gone a month maybe. There's a lot of fairs comin' on. He allus goes to 'em, and as like as not he'll be clapped in quod afore he gets through, and then I'll have quite a good time!"

Tim's smile was radiant at the prospect; but I felt bound to say—

"I don't think you ought to want your father to be put in prison, Tim," for of course I knew he was speaking of his father when he said "he." Then Tim grinned again and answered, with a twinkle in his eye—

"I know it be main bad of me, missie; but happen if you'd got a feyther like mine, you'd be glad as something should come to stop he from coming home to knock you about and steal every blessed farthing you made, and starve you as much as he dares."

And really I did not know what to say; for one

could not even fancy such a thing about Papa. But how dreadful for anyone to have a father like that! Yet we had seen the tinker ourselves, so we knew Tim spoke the truth. I did not pursue that topic any farther.

"Tim," I said instead, "do you know how to sell apples?"

His eyes were all eager and aglow in a moment.

"I can sell anything, missie, anything you like! Me and Neddy goes everywhere. Folks knows us, too, and knows as I don't cheat 'em. We've abin selling fir cones this morning. There's a nice lady as likes 'em for her fires. She lives nigh to Cricklethorpe, and the gen'leman paints picturs. He drawed Neddy and me once. He gived me a shillin' just for standin' still a spell. That were foine! She asked me to-day how soon apples would come ripe! I guess as she wanted some herself!"

"O Tim, how splendid. Do come and look at our tree! They are quite ripe. Aunt Isabel calls them quarrendens, I think——"

"Right ye are, missie, 'tis quarrendens as comes ripe first. Them will allus sell well. Them and the kinds as keeps. Early and late—they's the sorts to make money off. Let I see 'em. I'll sell 'em for you fast enough!"

This was splendid ! We took Tim then and there to look at the tree. It stood in one corner of the orchard, so that some of its boughs hung over the wall. Tim gazed at the fruit with an air of infinite wisdom.

"They be small ; but they be a foin colour——"

"And they're bigger round this side, Tim," Dimples cried, having scrambled up by the aid of a few projecting stones ; Dimples was splendid at climbing, so light and never afraid of falling. I climbed a little way after her and said—

"I think we must keep a few boughs ourselves. The boys might not think it fair if we sold them all ; though we did talk about selling our ribstones when they came in."

"Let I gather these on this side, missie," said Tim, "I can fill Neddy's panniers in no time ! I'll take 'em along to the lady, and to Cricklethorpe, if she don't want them all ; and I'll bring you back the money faithful—that I will. I ain't a thief ! though they does call I 'hang-gallus.' You wait till I be a bit bigger, and see me thrash 'em. I'm larning fine from feyther. When he's in a good temper he teaches I. One day I'll show un I knows how to ~~use~~ my fists ! "

Tim's face suddenly darkened over with the look I did not like to see. It made Dimples, who was

watching him from the top of the wall, shrink back a little.

I hastened to turn the conversation, for I liked Tim, and I did not want to have to think him a naughty boy.

"I want to talk to you about the money, Tim. We shall want you and Neddy a good deal soon to get us gravel and turf and things like that ; and we want ferns and plants and the herbs and lavender that Mother Goose promised us—O, and there may be other things I can't think of now that we shall want carried. And we haven't got much money ; but we've got these apples. We must keep a few ; but most of them we can sell——"

Tim smote his leg and cried—

"Tell you what, missie, you let I have these yer quarrendens to sell ; and I'll do all your carting for you honest like, as much as ever you want. I dunno quite what I'll get for the apples ; and I dunno quite how much you wants of Neddy and I ; but I'll chance it. Give I the apples, and I'll pick 'em fair and right, and I won't hurt the tree doing it. I knows all about that sort of work, so I does ! And I'll work for you—the and Neddy, so long as you wants. Is it a bargain ? "

I thought it a splendid arrangement. To this

day I do not know who had the best of that bargain ; I only know that both parties were completely satisfied, which is the essence of a really satisfactory bargain, I suppose.

" That will be just splendid, Tim ; and you can begin now and we'll help you. Because we shall soon want Neddy for other things, and you might just as well take the apples at once if they're fit."

" Right you are, missie ! " cried the eager Tim, and forthwith we all began picking, Tim showing us how to gather the apples so as not to hurt the tree. I thought he was a very careful nice boy to think of that ; and whilst we picked he told us funny tales that we did not always quite understand because when he was excited he used such funny words and expressions. I'm afraid some of them weren't quite nice words ; but poor Tim had never been taught better.

His father used to take him to the fairs when he was little, and make him do some acrobatic tricks. Tim tried to show us a few of these ; but he said he'd never been able to do them properly since he had had rheumatic fever about three years ago ; and after that his father had grown cruel to him, because he couldn't make money out of him. It was very interesting ; but it seemed very sad.

Tim said he never had had any mother to count. He could not remember her. And when Dimples asked him whether he ever said his prayers, he grinned and said he only knew one that "the ladies" in the hospital had taught him, and he'd half forgotten that. It was "Our Father" we found, when Dimples questioned farther; but he said it so funny we could scarcely make it out, and he didn't a bit know what it meant. You see, this was before children were obliged to go to school, and Tim had never learned to read or write, though he could do sums in his head much quicker than we could on a slate. We found that out when we talked about selling apples. But as for any other kind of learning, he did not seem to have an idea about it. Most of Dimples' questions only elicited a broad smile and a shake of the head, as though he could not even frame a reply. So we began talking to him about our garden, and explaining just what we were doing and wanted to do; and that he seemed to understand quite, and was eager to help us. He made lavish promises as to what he and Neddy could accomplish when once they set to work; and I began to feel quite hopeful again, in spite of Gordon's defection.

Besides, I knew that Gordon would come back.

It was just his way to get tired of a steady task, have a rest, perhaps a flare up, call everything "a beastly nuisance, not worth the grind!" and then after a bit come round, work as hard as ever, and be as nice as possible.

I had never known Gordon stick quite so hard to anything before as to our garden ; so it was not very wonderful that he had run off to-day. I wished that he and Roger had not quarrelled so hotly over it, and that Gordon had not taken all his money without saying anything to us. If he had a new bat he would be sure to be very keen over cricket for some time. But by-and-bye he would remember the garden and want to help again. I only hoped that Roger would not be nasty to him when he did.

"Boys can be so very difficult when they get all out at elbows with each other," I thought, "and I'm afraid I don't a bit know how to be a peacemaker. I wonder what I could do!"

## CHAPTER XII

### COMPLICATIONS

NEXT day Dimples and I went back to the garden, and as we climbed up the path towards the gazebo, Dimples gave a little cry of wonder and pleasure.

"O Polly, look! Some gravel has come!"

It was true enough. There was quite a little heap of nice red gravel lying near the gazebo on the piece of ground where our lavender and "yarb" garden was to be.

"Why, Tim must have been at work last night, or quite early this morning! What a nice, good boy he is!"

It was plain that several loads had been brought by our faithful henchman, and Cubbie was eager to see how it would look laid down.

"Let's get some on the path that goes round the

grass ring," he pleaded. "Gearge picked up a bit of that for us the other day. I could soon do the rest, and it would be so splendid to see how a path would look!"

"So it would. But perhaps we'd better do the long path by the rockery first. I know somebody said the turf ought to be laid before the gravel, and that we ought to begin gravelling at the bottom, so as not to be always treading over what we laid down. We must wheel it in our little box barrow. I think we could, if we don't take too much at once."

"Come on then!" cried Cubbie excitedly. "Roger doesn't want me to-day. He says he can do best alone; and Gearge comes up sometimes to help him. O, do let's begin to gravel ourselves! I know they think we can't do anything heavy without them, and I'm just sure we can!"

I did not see why we should not try at least. The long path by Gordon's rockery had been properly cut out. The gully for the water made one edge, and we had put stones along it to make the water run better, and Dimples and I had made the other stone edge at odd times, when there did not seem much else for us to do. The path had been trodden nice and hard by our feet whilst we worked at the

rockery, and all the stones had been cleared off to use in making it. So now it was all ready for the gravel ; and there was the gravel waiting at the top of the garden ; and really it was rather fun lading the little box barrow, and trundling it down from top to bottom.

"We won't take it straight," I said, "we'll always go along one of the little paths we've marked out. It'll help to make them hard and firm, ready to be gravelled in their turn. If we wheel straight down through everything, we shall sort of spoil the look of the ground, and we don't want our beds made any harder than they are."

By-and-bye we had got enough gravel down for me to work at the bottom of the hill, whilst Cubbie and Dimples went up for a fresh load. It was quite interesting work spreading the little yellow heaps. First, throwing the gravel down with a spade, and then getting a rake and raking it smooth, beginning at the end, and not treading upon it after it was raked over.

"O, doesn't it look nice ?—Doesn't it look nice ! cried Dimples again and again, "like a real live garden ! O Polly, won't the Squire be pleased when he sees it ? "

"We ought to roll it," said Cubbie suddenly ;

"they always roll gravel to make it hard. I've seen them in the Park when they've put it down fresh. I wonder if we could get a roller! I'll go and ask Gearge."

Dimples and I sat down to rest whilst Cubbie was gone. We looked at our handiwork with pride and pleasure.

"We are prospering to-day, Polly," said Dimples, with a sigh of satisfaction. "Don't you fink it's rather nice sometimes not to have all the boys round to say 'Do' or 'don't' to us?"

There certainly was something rather nice in our independence of masculine rule; for Cubbie did not count in that way, as he was quite useful, but did not order us about. He came toiling back to us presently, not with a roller, but with a funny sort of implement, a stick with a heavy flat piece of wood attached, and Cubbie explained—

"Gearge doesn't think we could manage a roller; but he's sent us a beater. I know what to do. He showed me."

And Cubbie set to work to pat and beat the gravel with the flat, heavy piece of wood, and we all took turns at it, so that soon the gravel looked firm and nice; and before we had used up all that Tim had brought us, the path was half done,

and didn't it look nice too ! If only we could have had the ferns planted in the rockery, that end of the garden would have seemed quite finished !

Next day when we arrived, it looked as though the pixies had been at work ; for our path by the rockery was quite finished from end to end, raked and beaten and everything ; though there was no gravel collected at the top of the garden. It was Cubbie who first guessed what had happened.

" Tim's done it ! He brought some more gravel, and when he saw what we'd done, he just went on with it for us. See ! Neddy has been all down and up again through our garden. I can see his hoof-marks. Doesn't it look jolly, just ! I say, I wonder how Gordon will feel when he sees what we can do without him ! I rather think he thought we'd have to give it up altogether if he didn't help. What a lark ! "

Having no gravelling to get on with, we set ourselves to marking out better the radiating paths, which meant clearing off the stones to make good edges, and getting rid of them out of the part where the paths and beds were to come.

This was always rather dull and tedious work. We had done it off and on all the time ; but it was a slow process, and we were apt to get tired

of it. So we did not do a great deal at once. And after lunch to-day we thought we would go and see what Roger was doing, up on the hillside by the dam.

But Roger was not there. We went to take him his share of the fruit—he always carried his lunch in his own pockets now—but we did not find him. Cubbie explained to us what they were doing up by the pool.

"You see, here's our private water, where the water runs when we want it. Only they built it all up again, so that it can't run down our trench now. But they didn't touch the dam. Roger got there in time to stop that. That's all right. And here's where we're making our sluice-gate."

Cubbie showed us in the trench where the water was to flow down to feed our garden, a sort of wooden frame, made of stout square logs; the sort of things you see at the seaside when they are making breakwaters. They are called piles when they are big; but these were quite small, and set in a row across the trench, and there were some at the sides too. Cubbie was eager to explain.

"That's where the sluice-gate is to be. The piles are driven in to hold it fast, so that the water shan't carry it away. When the gate is made it will be

let down in front of the piles, rather like a portcullis, you know. And then we shall dig out again the stuff they stopped up our trench with to keep the water from coming down. But it will be stopped by the sluice-gate here, you see. Then when we want the water to come, somebody will just pull up the gate, and we shall have it jumping and leaping down as it did before. But if we want it to stop, we can just drop the sluice-gate again, and shut it off. Roger wanted to do it that way all the time ; but the others said it was too much trouble."

"But won't it flood the Squire's stoke hole ? " asked Dimples, " and make them angry again ? "

"No, because they're going to turn it back into the brook again lower down. Gearge is cutting a trench for that in the evenings. He's awfully kind to help us. He can dig so fast ; and he says he'll get some old pipes and cover it in, so that people can't see where the water runs. He says it will be better that way, and be nothing of a job for him."

We were very much interested by all this. We wanted to see the sluice-gate making. Cubbie said most likely we should find Roger at the carpenter's shop, on the outskirts of the village, near

the common. We thought it would be nice to go and see him there. We had done a good morning's work, and Tim had forestalled us in what we expected to have had to do to-day. So off we started light-heartedly enough towards the village, taking the path which brought us out upon the open green, not very far from where the carpenter's shop stood.

But just before we got through the trees and into the open, we heard a great noise of boys' voices shouting and hooting and yelling. Angry sounding tones they were too, and I was sure I heard a familiar voice shouting out—

“Hang-gallus! hang-gallus! He's been stealing, he's been stealing! They're thieves, every one of 'em—jail-birds and gallus-birds! What, you'd fight me, young imperence! Then take that, and that, and that——”

A yell and a howl followed; but it seemed to me that it was the speaker himself who howled out. Suddenly I felt sure what was happening. Cocky was attacking Tim—our good, little, faithful Tim! And as I dashed forward, I heard another shout.

“Stealing apples! stealing apples! O, the little hang-gallus! Us'll get the bobby to he!”

I was out in the open now. I understood it all. There was Cocky squaring up to little Tim, eyes blazing, fists clenched. And there was Tim, bristling all over like a little bantam ; and it was plain he had given Cocky one in the eye already ; for one of his optics was fast closing up, and he was in a white heat of fury.

"Stop ! Stop ! Stop !" I cried, "you don't understand ! He's not a thief ! He doesn't steal apples. He sells them for us. It's all right. You shan't touch him, Cocky ! It's very wicked of you to call him names and pretend things that aren't true——"

"He's a hang-gallus, and he's had the cheek to hit I. I'll do for un. See if I don't. You get gone, missie. You don't know nofin' about he. He's a bad un and allus was. I'm a-goin' to give him what for ! "

It was hopeless, my pleading. Tim's eyes were ablaze with wrath and fury.

"Come on, come on, you great hulking bully !" I'm afraid Tim really used worse words than that ; but that was what he meant, "come on, and get another ! I be ready, that I be ! Did I steal them apples, you big liar ! Then I'll show you how it's done ! Come on, come on ! "

I was in despair. The boys were crowding and hustling round to see the fight. I had lifted Dimples on Neddy's back, to be out of the turmoil ; and I think it was a good thing I thought of doing that, or I fear poor Tim's load of apples would have been rifled very quickly ; but with Dimples in charge, so to speak, nobody tried to touch it.

"Cubbie, run for Roger, run for Roger !" I cried, and Cubbie was off like an arrow from a bow. When I had sent him I rather wondered what Roger could do when he got here ; but it was so horrid to have poor little Tim knocked about by big Cocky, and all for doing something for us, for it was our quarrendens that were in his panniers.

I had now and then seen our boys fight ; but that was only for a few minutes, and they had very seldom hurt one another. But it was horrid to see the look in Cocky's eyes as he hit out at Tim with his great strong arms, that were to make him a blacksmith in time like his father. Again and again I thought that Tim must have been felled to the ground ; but he skipped aside in a wonderful way, and every now and then he would turn as quick as lightning, and deal Cocky a blow that evoked a yell of rage or pain. But if Tim

was hit he never made a sound. I suppose, perhaps, he was more accustomed to blows.

It seemed an age before I saw Roger running towards us. Cubbie tore along beside him, and I think he had explained the matter as they went. Then, just as Roger came up, I remembered that he had a crow to pluck with Cocky on his own account, and I felt rather sorry I had called him. But perhaps Cocky would stop when Roger told him to. Boys will do things for boys, when they only laugh at girls.

' You great big cowardly bully ! Hit a lad of your own size if you must ! You let that little chap alone ! He's done nothing, I tell you. You stop that—"

Then Cocky used a dreadful word, and turned on Roger in a towering passion. I am sure that Cocky and Roger had disputed before. They looked just like angry dogs who are simply longing for a fight.

Roger's jacket was off as he ran from the carpenter's shed. When Cocky squared up to him, he was all ready. Next moment they were at it—hammer and tongs, and the village urchins were shouting with delight, cheering on, some one, and some the other. And I was vainly trying to make

them hear me, as I begged and entreated them to stop. But not a word could they hear, nor would they have cared if they had. Their blood was up, and they meant to fight it out.

But help was nearer than I had dared to hope. Suddenly from out of the blacksmith's forge the smith himself strode forth with mighty energy. The village urchins fled at sight of him. Next minute he had Cocky by the collar, and was shaking him till his teeth seemed to rattle in his head.

" Fighting again, you young varmint ! " he cried, " and the quality, too ! I be fair shamed wi' ye, that I be ! Take that—and that—and that ! "

Cocky yelled lustily. Tim was fairly dancing, with glee ; but Roger sprang forward—

" It wasn't exactly his fault that he was fighting me. He was hitting a little fellow, and I called him off to fight a fellow his own size——"

" Which you're not, sir, asking your pardon," spoke the smith, with his vice-like grip still on Cocky's shoulder ; " it's just his wicked love of fighting. I know he ! I know where he gets it, and I'll thrash it out of un, that a will ! or he'll come to a bad end, he will ! Before the little ladies, too, for shame of yourself. You get along ! I'll mend your manners for you with the strap——"

But I could not quite stand that threat. I was very angry with Cocky; but still, he had helped us with our garden, and he could be quite nice when he chose.

"Please don't punish him any more, Blacksmith," I said. "I think it was partly my fault, because I sent for my big brother to come. I'd better have sent for you. And Cocky has been quite kind and useful to us; and I don't want him to have the strap. I think Roger hurt him a good deal as it is."

"Good job too; teach him his manners. He thinks he can knock about anybody he stands up to, he does," and the smith led Cocky home by the ear, a humiliating method he had with him, whilst the little boys who had cheered him on at first, now followed jeering, leaving us standing alone together, with Tim and his donkey.

Tim was hugely delighted by the turn things had taken, and his admiration for Roger was unbounded.

"He's punished un proper," he said chuckling, "that he have. He won't play no more cricket for this summer, that ee won't. He's got his arm well pounded, so he has!"

I had noticed that Cocky had used his arms oddly, and I suppose he had parried Roger's heavy

blows with one, and got more than he bargained for. No more cricket! And of course, Cocky was the best bat of the Crickle Abbot team, except Gordon. That made me wonder what Gordon would say when he heard; and for that we had not long to wait.

We had just sat down to tea when our eldest brother came in with a stormy look on his face, and addressed himself to Roger in his most overbearing way.

"A nice sort of fellow you are! Sneaking out of the match yourself, and putting the next best fellow we have out of action too!"

"I never promised to play in your beastly little village match," answered Roger; "and as for that young brute, Cocky, if he chooses to play the bully, I'll thrash him every time I get the chance! I'm uncommonly glad I did best him. He deserved a thorough good trouncing, and I'm glad he's got a part of it, playing me that dirty trick, and throwing back our work a fortnight or more——"

"It wasn't his fault, you young ass!"

"It was; you know it was. I always said we ought to have<sup>a</sup> a back-flow; but he got you on his side and you were both against me, and I was fool enough to believe you. But you'll neither of

you have a hand in my show again, not if I know it! And if that Cocky fellow dares put his nose round my way again, I'll——”

“He’ll come just as often as I choose to bring him,” snarled Gordon.

“You bring him!” jeered Roger; “why, you’re off the job altogether now. We’re going to finish without you. And jolly glad we all are too!”

“Don’t, Roger, don’t!” I pleaded. “We want Gordon back very badly when he has time to come. O Gordon, you will be so pleased. We’ve gravelled all your long path by the rockery, and it does look so nice! Tinker’s Tim helped us. He brings us gravel and things——”

“Well, I don’t see you’ve any right to let a boy like that into the Squire’s garden,” spoke Gordon loftily; “everybody know she comes of a bad lot, and is a regular little thief himself——”

“O Gordon, he isn’t!” cried Dimples; “he’s a very nice good boy—at least, he would be good if anybody taught him how.”

“And Cocky won’t have him there either when we come back——”

“Cocky will go out quicker than he comes in if he tries that on!” quoth Roger.

And the more I tried to be a peacemaker, the

more the boys wrangled ; till I really began to wonder whether we should ever get that garden done. And it had been so nice at first. I wonder how it is that in the middle of a thing so often everything seems to go agog.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE OLIVE BRANCH

IT was simply splendid the way it all went off. It was ever so much better than the first time; only that my pleasure was a little damped by the fact that Gordon was not there, and that the sense of being a divided party still remained amongst us.

But though Roger had not been quite nice to Gordon, nor seemed to care to make things up, he was really very clever, and I was immensely proud of him.

We all went up to see his sluice-gate when it was made and fitted into its place between the double row of piles which protected it from the force of the water when it came. It had a frame made for it, set with stones and cement, and it worked up and down beautifully, and fitted as close as close!

Then when everything was ready and the gate closed down, the boys began clearing away all the earth and stones which choked up the head of our channel, all the stuff the Squire's men had hurled into our dyke to stop the water from coming down. Gearge was there to help us, and he worked like a Trojan ; and very soon the water began coming into our channel, and soon it was quite full and the channel free ; and only the sluice-gate stopped it from rushing down the hill again.

Roger examined his gate very closely now, to see if there were any leak ; but it fitted beautifully, and not a drop to matter oozed through. Then came the great moment of lifting the sluice. It worked, as Cubbie had said, rather like a portcullis. Roger and Gearge stood one on each side, and they raised it together and fixed it open as far as they wished, and the water just shot down the channel and went leaping along, and we went leaping after it, shouting and cheering.

It came down beautifully ! Gearge had improved our little cascade places, and now they really looked like little real waterfalls. It was lovely ! And when it reached the basin there was one little pipe to carry it along the rockery, just a little of it, and the rest filled the basin, but did not slop over

as it had done the first time, all anyhow; for they had made what they called an overflow pipe, which took it away tidily, and it ran into Gearge's big covered-up pipes, and so back to the stream.

There was no fear of angry gardeners coming running up the hill to say the stoke hole was being flooded. Even the smaller trickle through the rockery was carried off somewhere where it could do no harm. Roger and Gearge between them had thought of everything. And it was just splendid to see the water leaping down, and to have the basin to dip a can into to make our ground moist when we wanted it. We watered all the brown circle of earth that was waiting for the turf, and Gearge said that so soon as we got a good rain (we had only had a few showers all the summer weeks we had been at Abbess Well, for it happened to be an unusually dry summer, which, for many things, was nice for us) he didn't see why we shouldn't start turfing. If the grass did go off a bit brown at first "twouldn't signify nohow." The winter would be coming, with plenty of rain, and that would set it all to rights again.

So we were in great spirits as we sat at our picnic lunch that day. Gearge had gone back to his work, with a big hunch of cake in his hands, and we had

set aside some of our good things for Tim, who was steadily bringing in gravel. In the mornings he went out with baskets of apples ; but in the afternoon he brought down gravel from a place on the hillside above, not very far away ; and often he started very, very early in the morning, and got in several loads before we arrived. I hope he fed Neddy well ; for he was at work almost all day long.

But just now the four of us were alone, and Cubbie and Dimples were so fascinated by watching our little waterfalls that they had taken their food a little lower down to admire them, and to fill their horn cup from the sparkling water as it danced and leaped down over the big stone slabs that Gearge had set for it. Roger and I were alone ; and Roger was looking tremendously pleased. All the gloom which sometimes darkened his face had gone ; and I thought I should never have him in a better mood than this.

" Roger," I began, rather frightened lest I should make a muddle of it, " shall you be *very* busy over anything just for these next few days ? "

Roger's eyes went round the garden, where certainly there was a good bit to do still, and he looked at me rather surprised ; for he knew I was in a great hurry to get on with the gravelling

and the turfing, and that we could not do much unless he helped us. We had been waiting for that till the water part had been finished.

" You see," I went on, " I was wondering whether—just for the rest of this week—you could offer to take Cocky's place in the eleven, and play in the match on Saturday. Gordon does so want for Crickle Abbot to win ; but he says he has such a lot of duffers in the team : Cocky was the only one he could really reckon on. But you play very well, Roger, almost as well as Gordon ; and often you make longer scores because he so often gets run out. And then your left-hand bowling helps so much——"

" O, I'm all out of practice now. Gordon wouldn't even thank me for offering ! He'd just snub me off, and make me look a fool ! Not I, Polly, I'll stick to the garden. It's a deal more important than cricket. Come ! "

I twisted my hands together ; it was difficult to say in the right way just what I meant.

" Yes, Roger, I know the garden is more important than cricket ; but it isn't just the cricket I was thinking of."

" Then what the dickens is it you're driving at ? " said Roger, who was not always quite careful to avoid the words our parents did not like the boys to use.

"You see, it's Gordon. I'm sure he wants to make it up now; but he doesn't know how to begin——"

"He knows fast enough how to begin to make himself jolly disagreeable!"

"Yes, yes, don't you see, that's just the difficulty. He knows it was his fault——"

"Well, I should just think so! He's been like a bear with a sore head for more than a week on end! I'm a bit sick of it, too! I don't see why I'm to eat humble pie to him. No fear!"

I did not feel that I was making much headway with my peacemaking; but it's no good making up your mind to try and do something, if you mean to give up before you've half begun. So I took my courage in both hands and said—

"I don't think it's eating humble pie to try and make it up with Gordon; but even if it were, don't you think—I mean it is so horrid when we can't do things all together. And Mamma would be sorry. She always helped us to make things right again when they went wrong. We haven't got Mamma here to help us. But we know what she would like. Can't we do it to please her, even though she doesn't know?"

Roger said nothing ; but he didn't seem vexed with me ; and I took courage to go on.

"Last night Gordon was quite nice again—to me. He came to my room when Dimples was asleep, and told me about the cricket ; and asked about the garden. Roger, I'm sure he wants to make it up ; only—only—you don't make it very easy for him, you know. I know Gordon is horrid when he begins to quarrel ; but—but—"

"You mean that I am horrid at the end."

I had not quite meant that ; but in a way it was true. For Roger used to have a way of doing what we called "getting into his shell." When he did that you didn't seem able to get at him, or to get near him. And it had been like that between him and Gordon all the past week.

"Roger, if you would just offer to play in the match on Saturday for Gordon, I believe he would come back to work in the garden with us on Monday, and everything would be nice again ! O Roger, do ! "

Roger made no promise. I couldn't make out from his face what he was thinking.

"It's easier for you really, Roger ; because it was so much more Gordon's fault. Mamma always said that about a quarrel, that it was the hardest

for the one who began to hold out the olive branch, don't you remember that was what she used to call it. I know Gordon wants to come back and work in the garden really—after Saturday; but I don't think he will, unless you help him."

"Gordon's been so awfully uppish lately, too cocky by half!"

"But isn't that all the more reason why we should try and help him?"

"O, bother!" cried Roger, rather crossly. "Don't you begin to try and talk like the grown-ups, Poll. It don't sound improving from a kid like you!"

That was the sort of rather horrid thing Roger could say, things that made you feel hot and angry all over, and it seemed rather hard just when I was trying to—

Suddenly I remembered what it was I was trying to do, and thought how dreadful it would be if I were to get cross instead. So I swallowed down the lump in my throat and said—

"Yes, Roger, I suppose it does sound horrid of me, as though it were not partly my fault too—"

"O, come, Poll, your fault! that's a good 'un!"

"Well, I mean I think some sisters could do more for Gordon than I do. When he's cross I'm sort of afraid to talk to him. And often I feel

cross with him, too ; I did about the garden, and after he'd taken his money I felt worse. I didn't try a bit to put things right, and perhaps I might have done. Some girls can ; but——”

“ O, cheer up, Polly, you're the sort of girl we like long chalks better than your pi-saint kind ! Come along, old girl, and let's get some more gravel down the long path by our stream. We can be doing that anyhow. And I've been thinking a lot about that other side opposite, down by the other yew hedge. I think the best thing there would be another path, not too wide, down by the hedge, and then a narrow border where we can make a sort of low hedge of rhododendrons. There are whole plantations up yonder of tiny plants, seedlings, I suppose you would call them—the common sort, ponticums, isn't that the name ? They can be moved any time of year, Gearge says, and they grow fast in this soil. It would make rather a jolly sort of finish to that side ; and not be very difficult either. Hullo, here comes Tim and his gravel. We'll have him dump it down in heaps just where we want it, and we'll go ahead like fun ! ”

We did, too ! Roger was splendid to work when he had any idea in his head. He never got tired,

and he was so quick to see just the best way of doing things, and how to do it with the least amount of waste labour.

"Make your head save your hands," was a maxim I had often heard in Aunt Susanna's lips ; but I never understood quite so well what she meant as when I worked with Roger this afternoon.

We were in great spirits at tea that evening, and I am sure that Gordon felt rather "out of it," as he had not been near the garden for more than a week ; and I knew he was beginning to be sorry about it. But he had promised to be captain of the cricket match, and he had to go on. I asked him how he was getting on with his team ; but he only shrugged up his shoulders despondingly.

"They are such precious little asses, you can't drive any sense into them. We shall get well licked, I know. Cocky was the only one any real good ; and now he can't play more than a kid—"

"I'll play for you if you like !" suddenly blurted out Roger. "I don't know if I'll be much good. I'm all anyhow about practice. But if you think I'd be any help—"

Gordon's face suddenly cleared. Gordon was like that. He wasn't a sulker ; though he could be jolly cross for a goodish while when he was put

out. But it wasn't hard to him to make up afterwards ; that was harder for Roger always.

"I say, though, will you really ? That would be prime ! But you'll come and practise first, won't you ? "

"Of course I will ! I can give a few days now, till Saturday anyhow. After that——"

"O, after that we shan't be having any more cricket. At least, I shan't. I'm coming back to the garden then. I say, tell me how you've been getting on ! "

We told him everything. He was awfully pleased about the water and the big success it had been.

"Wish I'd been there ; but I've such lots to do coaching these louts of fellows. However, if you'll help me through this, Roger, I'll work like a navvy ever afterwards ! O, we'll have that thirty pounds yet ! Only, I say, I shan't feel as though I'd done much towards the earning of it. I must tell them all so."

"O, rot !" spoke Roger with a snort. "What's a few days, 'specially if you're going to make it up afterwards ? I'm going to take a few days off myself now, if it comes to that. And we can't do so very much till we get more gravel carted and have some rain ; but they say the weather is

beginning to gather for rain, and that we shall get some soon, and then won't we steam ahead, that's all!"

The clouds had quite broken up and sailed out of our sky. We sat in the pleasant dusk talking and planning till we were ready for bed; and as I said good-night to Roger, I gave him a big squeeze; and though we didn't say a word, I knew he was glad he had done it, and that we were all one united party again.

On Saturday we all took holiday, and went to see the match, which was played on the green at Cricklethorpe, just about a mile and a half from home.

Tim lent us Neddy for Dimples to ride; he wanted to watch the play himself. He was very keen on cricket, and Cubbie explained to our boys very eagerly that Tim could play a lot better than heaps of the village boys; only they would never have him. Tim had smartened himself up mightily. I suppose the absence of his father and the sale of the apples had replenished his coffers. For he had on a pair of old white flannel trousers, which some neighbour had cut short for him, and which were really clean and whole; and his shirt was clean, too, and though a little patched, was not ragged;

and he had quite a smart handkerchief knotted round his throat, and a straw hat with a brim that really belonged to it and a ribbon round the crown.

"O Tim, you do look nice!" cried Dimples again and again, as he conducted her in state to the place for the play.

The boys were there before us; Gordon had to get his team into order, and give them their last instructions. As we approached we saw that something was wrong; there was a great deal of talking and discussion going on; and Cubbie ran forward to find out what the matter was, and presently came back dragging Gordon with him to the place where we waited.

"This is Tim, Gordon," he cried; "he can bowl spiffingly—you try him! Real curly twisters, I know! He's bowled them to me. You'd better take him on! He's ever so much better than those young gawneys! Try him and see!"

Tim was red with astonishment; but he did not suffer from bashfulness, and he wasn't a bit nervous bowling to Gordon; and didn't he bowl well, too! Cubbie explained to us that one of Gordon's team—one of the best—had run off to some fair, six or seven miles off, and though there were several village boys ready to take his place, Gordon called

them a pack of rubbish, and wouldn't look at them if he could help it.

"He would have put me in," Cubbie explained with some pride, "only I told him Tim would be ever so much better. Look at his balls! Aren't they puzzlers. Even Gordon has to block them. He can't play them!"

It was plain that Gordon was astonished at the prowess of Tim in bowling. He went over to the rest of the team and spoke to them. It was plain they also had been impressed by what they saw. Cocky was not there. He had gone to the fair likewise. Tim was enrolled as a member of Gordon's team, and Cubbie was tearing about in great excitement to get him properly equipped before the rival team arrived.

That match was great fun! The other side won the toss, and went in; and they evidently thought they were going to have a good time of it; for Crickle Abbot had never done much in the cricket line so far. But before long, after a little fairly quick scoring, Gordon put on Roger to bowl from one wicket and Tim from the other. He kept wicket himself; and oh, what fun it was for us to watch!

Tim's very first ball took the bails clean off the

batsman's wicket. And he was about the best batsman they had! Roger bowled for catches, and got them too. Three wickets went in about twenty minutes; and scarcely any scoring was done. Then two boys, coming in almost together, hit out recklessly and wildly. They sent up the score by twenty runs, but then Tim got out one, and almost directly afterwards Roger disposed of the second, and nobody else really made a stand. The innings closed for little more than forty runs, to the huge astonishment of both villages.

Of course, Gordon's team was safe to win then. Gordon and Roger went in together to start, and they made nearly thirty before Gordon was run out. Roger stayed in all the time and carried out his bat after the fall of the fourth wicket. He had made one run less than Gordon; but he had played steadier, and had kept in.

As for Tim, he had not been wanted for batting; but his bowling had been a feature of the day.

"Won't Cocky be mad when he hears!" the little boy had remarked with a grin, and Gordon himself had turned to him and said—

"If he tries to bully you, just you let me know. I'll see it doesn't go on!"

Tim pulled his forelock as he answered grinning—

"I bean't a moight afraid of he! One of these days I'll lather un myself, see if I don't!"

We went home in the highest of spirits; Gordon's team had scored a complete victory; we were all the best of friends, and next week Gordon would come back and work in the garden with us.

## CHAPTER XIV

### SUNDAY

THAT very Saturday night the rain came down in torrents, and it was raining “cats and dogs” when we got up in the morning. Never was rain more welcome to thirsty parched ground, or to impatient workers than that.

“O look—look!” Dimples cried, as the drops chased each other down the window panes; “now I can have my lavender plants and my ‘yarbs’ from Mother Goose ! ”

“Now we can cut turf and lay it!” I chimed in. From the boys’ rooms we heard sundry kindred shouts, and Cubbie dashed in half-dressed to cry—

“Isn’t it simply splendidiferous! We’ve had our match and won it! Now we can go ahead in the garden. Gearge said just before that we really couldn’t do nothing proper now till we had rain! O jolly! jolly! jolly! Now we can dig borders and plant and do everything! Huroosh! Hurrah! ”

It really was splendid ; but it was Sunday too ; and the aunts did not like too much noise and rushing about on Sunday. They generally spoke of it as "the Lord's Day," and Aunt Isabel always came to have a little talk to us in the afternoon, and give us a Bible lesson. I think she was rather afraid of the boys—she did not know always just how to answer their questions. But they all liked Aunt Isabel, and you see, we had been brought up to reverence our elders ; so they did not let her see that they were sometimes rather bored, and Aunt Isabel did not make the lessons very long, I will say that.

We all went to church under umbrellas ; and to our surprise, saw Tim there, in his white flannel trousers well rolled up and a curious looking jacket, sizes too big for him, over his shirt. Dimples squeezed my hand very hard as she gave him a very emphatic nod.\*

When we were in our square pew, she whispered to me in a very cautious fashion—for Aunt Susanna did not approve of talking in church—

"I told Tim that I fought all good boys came to church ; but I didn't fink he was going to—I didn't fink he much cared whether he was good or not."

After the service, as we were going out, I managed

to lose Dimples from my side ; when I saw her, she was whispering in an animated way to Tim. Of course, I could not hear a word for the shuffling of feet. Dimples joined me quickly, but she did not say anything about her errand to Tim. I supposed she had been telling him she was pleased he had come to church. I wondered how he had liked it, and what it would feel like to be there for the first time, and to have so little idea what it was all about.

The rain had cleared off a little through the morning hours ; but as we sat at dinner, it came down again in torrents. It was quite strange to see everything dripping and green and dim ; it had seemed to be always sunshine at Abbess Well before.

" We have much cause to be thankful," Aunt Susanna said, " the country is wanting rain terribly. And your dear Papa will no doubt benefit by it also. The great heat of the summer 'nas tried him, and retarded his recovery somewhat. But I trust now that we shall have better accounts, and that he will gain ground rapidly."

" He'll be better enough to go in the big ship, won't he, Aunt Susanna," asked Dimples, " when we've got the firty pounds to send him ? "

" I trust so, my dear ; the sea trip is still said

to be the thing which will most benefit him after he has gained a little more ground ; but your Mamma also writes that she does not see her way to this. However, she is one of those wise women who have learned not to fret over any trouble or difficulty until she has to face it. It is possible that by the time your father is ready to go, the means will be forthcoming. Industry and perseverance will work wonders in this world of ours ! ” And Aunt Susanna’s face beamed upon us with unwonted kindness, and my heart swelled with joy and pride.

I saw Gordon’s face flush deeply, and felt sorry for him. I knew he was wishing now that he had stuck to the garden instead of taking all those days off for cricket ; but after all, he had done a lot before ; and to-morrow he would start work with us again. And it had been all his doing that our village had won the cricket match ! Everybody was pleased about that, even Aunt Susanna, who did not know anything about cricket, and who could not understand why the side that was out had eleven players in the field, and the side that was in only two ! Perhaps it is rather a curious arrangement if you come to think of it, only I don’t know how you could play cricket any other way.

After dinner we ran upstairs to look through our texts and collects, and then Aunt Isabel came up to us to hear us say them, and to give us a Bible lesson, as Mamma always did on Sunday afternoons.

It was about the Good Samaritan to-day, and Dimples was very much interested, and asked a great many questions about neighbours, and what we had to do for them. But presently she got a little fidgetty, and looked rather often at the clock ; and directly Aunt Isabel had finished talking to us she got up, rather red in the face, and asked—

“ Please, Aunt Isabel, may I go down to the wood barn ? ”

“ The wood barn ! My dear child, what in the world do you want to go there for ? ”

Redder and redder got Dimples' little face as she made her answer.

“ I'm going to give Tim a Bible lesson, and esplain things to him. Tim's a nice boy, Aunt Isabel. He let me ride Neddy yesterday all the way there and back. I had a great deal of con—con—convelation with him. He doesn't know anything about Jesus. But he'd like to know. I said I'd teach him. It wasn't naughty, was it ? ”

"No, my dear," said Aunt Isabel gently; "I am glad that Tim should learn about Jesus."

"I fought you would be," spoke Dimples earnestly. "You see, it was like this. Tim said he was coming to-morrow—that's to-day, you know, Sunday—to get the rest of the apples to sell to holiday trippers, who came out on the river over beyond Cricklethorpe on Sunday afternoon. And I told him he mustn't do that, 'cause it was Sunday. I told him I fought he ought to come to church; and he said he would; but that he knew he shouldn't 'twig a word.' That means he wouldn't understand anyfing he heard. So then I said if he'd come in the afternoon to the orchard I'd esplain as much as I could. So he said he would. Only as it rained this morning, I just whispered to him after church to come to the wood barn. May I have my hymn-book to take, too. Tim has such a nice voice. He would like to sing a hymn, I know."

"My dear," said Aunt Isabel kindly, "you may take Tim into the laundry, and I will have some tea sent to him there by-and-bye; and presently we will all come and sing a few hymns there together; and if Tim likes to join us he may."

For in the laundry there was a harmonium, because Aunt Susanna had Mothers' Meetings there;

and it was a nice, big, cheerful room, that only looked really like a laundry once a fortnight, when there was a big wash.

Dimples' face was beaming as she trotted off. Cubbie ran after her, begging to come too, because Cubbie was a great friend of Tim's, and always claimed to have "discovered" him. Dimples never minded Cubbie; but I thought she would do better without me; and I was sure Tim would talk more freely to the little ones alone.

Aunt Isabel went her way; Roger strolled off whistling to some haunt of his own; but Gordon did not go away; he stood looking out of the window at the falling rain, his hands in his pockets, his back to the room. It was only when the door had closed finally, and we had been alone for some few minutes that he turned towards me and said—

"Polly, I've got something to tell you. I've been a horrid brute."

"No, you haven't, Gordon; it was your own money."

"O, I say! Then you've found out!"

"O, yes, didn't Roger tell you?"

"Roger and I haven't done much in the confiding line this past week!"

"Well, you see, it was like this. Roger wanted

some of his money for the wood and things for his sluice-gate, and we thought we should want ours for sixpences for Tim. So we went to the box—you were gone out, so we couldn't tell you. But when we had shaken it open and looked at the packets, we saw that yours had gone——”

“ It was worse than that, Polly. I'd cribbed one of yours too. I found I hadn't quite enough of my own. But of course, I'm going to pay it back ! ”

“ O, that doesn't matter, Gordon, indeed it doesn't ; because, after all, we didn't want the money. Tim had the apples instead. He was pleased, and so were we. Some of them were your apples, Gordon. The tree belongs to us all. I don't mind a bit about the money. You needn't pay it back. I'll give it you, Gordon. I'm glad you should have a good bat. You wanted one badly. Yours had been spliced so often.”

“ I've a good mind to sell it though, I feel such a beast. Roger played just as well as I did, with his old one.”

“ His was better than yours. He doesn't swipe his balls like you. It would be a pity to sell it at the end of the season. Nobody would care to buy it.”

"That's just it. I did ask some of the Cricklethorpe fellows ; but that was just the trouble. Nobody wants a new bat just now. I was a fool to get it. Look here, Polly, I may as well speak the truth about it, though you'll hate me for it ; I did it as much to vex and rile you all, and keep the money from being spent on the garden, as because I wanted the new bat."

I didn't hate him a bit for saying this. I knew just how he had felt after that big quarrel with Roger. Gordon did get into very hot rages ; but then, afterwards he was horribly sorry. He was horribly sorry now.

"I didn't want you to do it without me ; and I didn't mean to bother over it any more. At least, that's what I thought then. I can't think how I could have been such a young brute, with Papa and Mamma and everything——"

He stopped and we looked at one another and wondered why it was that often such angry wicked thoughts and feelings came to us.

"I suppose it's the devil gets at us, Gordon, and puts all the horrid feelings into our hearts. That's what we've got to fight against, the world, the flesh and the devil ! The world means being vain and selfish and fond of pleasure, Aunt Susanna

says, and the flesh is being greedy and lazy, and the devil is being wicked, letting Satan tempt us to be angry and passionate and horrid! And he's so strong, he's the worst of the three!"

Gordon nodded; and presently jerked out—

"I believe I know what's been the matter with me."

"O Gordon, what?"

"I've not half said my prayers! I didn't think it seemed to matter. I felt pretty good, and any sort of little gabble did. I was mostly thinking about other things all the time. When I was in a rage that week, I didn't even try to say my prayers. And I promised Mamma I would always. What a horrid beast I am!"

"It's so hard not to think of other things you're interested in whilst you're saying your prayers," I said with a sigh; "I'm always doing it. And Aunt Isabel, when I told her, said that she did too—just think of that, Gordon—Aunt Isabel herself! She said we couldn't do anything without help, not even saying our prayers! Isn't that funny, Gordon? Fancy grown-up people wanting help for things, just like us!"

Gordon had gone back to the window and was looking out once more.

"That's just it, one's always coming such beastly coppers. And I know I shall do it again and again. I've got such a horrid temper. When it's up I'm fit to kill anybody. I hate the whole lot of you, and myself on top!"

He laughed then, and I laughed too, and came and stood beside him, looking out at the welcome falling rain.

"It is rather dreadful to feel how horrid one is! Do you remember in the garden, Gordon, when I was so cross, and went away and sulked?"

"Did you? no, I don't remember."

"Well, I did; and it was the sun-dial that stopped me!"

"What on earth do you mean?"

"I mean what I say. The letters on the sun-dial, 'Fugit hora—ora.' The Squire had told me what they meant. I didn't a bit want to pray at first, it seemed so queer out there in the garden; but by-and-bye I did. Then it was all right again; and we had such a nice afternoon. Gordon, do you know what I think?"

"No; but you can tell me."

"Well, I think that the devil can't stay bothering us when we begin to pray. I think he has to run away. I suppose, perhaps, if we really do pray,

Jesus is somehow there, and Satan can't be anywhere where He is. Mamma always told us that, don't you remember?"

Gordon made no answer; but I did not notice, for I was trying hard to remember a certain Sunday afternoon, and a lesson Mamma had give us that seemed to bear upon this subject somehow.

"Do try to remember, Gordon; it was something about the beginning and the end of the Bible; and how it all had to do with the coming of Jesus! It was so interesting, and it wasn't so very long ago either. You must remember, I think!"

"O, I know what you mean, I think. Yes, what was it? She said that at the end of things Jesus would have the victory over the devil——"

"Yes, and so at the very end of the Bible are the words, 'Come, Lord Jesus!' because when He has come, Satan will be gone, gone away into hell for always."

"Yes, I remember now; and she said that the Bible began with something almost like that. And we said it didn't, it began about God creating heaven and earth. And then she showed us where it said, 'And God said let it be light, and it was light!' Go on, Polly, what was it she said about that?"

"Yes, I know now. She said that Jesus was the

Word. And at the Word of God the darkness fled away, just as Satan must fly away when Jesus comes. She told us that all through the Bible we should find the same thing; darkness and light, good and evil, fighting together. But that though Satan was prince of this world and the powers of darkness, Jesus was the Light and the Life, and He would conquer!"

"Well, that's a good job anyhow, for there's no sort of conquering for oneself!"

"No, indeed; that's just it, Gordon, just what Mamma is always wanting us to remember. We can't do it ourselves, but Jesus does it for us and in us, if we will let Him."

Then Roger came whistling back, and I think we were both rather glad of the interruption. And we began to talk very fast and eagerly about the garden, and all we were going to do there on the morrow, after this beautiful, beautiful rain. Roger told us that he'd been up and shut down his sluice-gate last thing on Saturday evening, when he heard the farmers say that they were certain sure it would rain buckets full before the morning. He didn't want too much water to come tearing down our little gully, in case it did not get carried away properly fast enough; so he let the brook have it

all. He was eager to see if his sluice-gate had proved strong enough to resist the larger volume of water ; but he thought it would be all right.

"I think I shall generally leave it half open in wet weather," he told us ; "it's a great thing to be able to regulate it by a hatch. I think a hatch is really a better name for it than sluice-gate ; for as a matter of fact it isn't a gate at all."

Soon Dimples came running in to fetch us to sing some hymns, which we did not mind at all, as it was raining much too hard to get out. Indeed, we always liked singing, and we scuttled down quickly to the laundry, where we found Tim in all the bravery of his new clothes, white trousers and all, standing before Aunt Isabel in the demurest way, and answering her questions with great alacrity and vividness, though he did not use those curious and very graphic expressions which I always felt doubtful about. He pulled his forelock almost every time he spoke to the lady ; and he pulled it harder still as we filed in, grinning us a welcome, and perhaps rather glad of the interruption. We had heard Aunt Isabel's closing words.

"Well, Tim, it would be better if you went regularly to Sunday school ; but if you think the other boys would tease you, and that your father

would not let you go if he were at home, we must wait for that for the present. And you may come here instead, every Sunday afternoon that you can get here, and we will see if we cannot amongs<sup>f</sup> us give you a Sunday lesson. It is a sad thing in a Christian land to find a little lad growing up almost like a little heathen boy ! ”

Tim looked a very happy little heathen, however, as he stood at a short distance and heard us sing. Dimples would have joined books with him, but he could not read sufficiently well for that, and he preferred to stand apart and stare at us wide-eyed and intently listening.

Then at about the third verse of any hymn he would join in as clear and true as a bird, and sing without any words, at the full strength of his voice.

Dimples was delighted, and when the singing was done, she went eagerly over to him and said—

“ I'll teach you the words<sup>t</sup> as we work in the garden, Tim, and then next Sunday you'll be able to sing with us beautifully ! ”

## CHAPTER XV

### PROSPERING

"THERE'S a roight way and a wrong way of doin' most things," remarked Gearge sententiously, as he gazed at our turfing operation. "Happen theer may be a dozen wrong ones to one right. But come to larn the roights of it first, and save yourself a pack o' troubles. You come along of I. Oi'll show 'ee how them turves should be cut!"

"O, but Gearge—dear Gearge—it looks so beautiful," pleaded Dimples.

"No, it doesn't, it looks disgusting!" said Roger with a laugh; "it won't come even, and it's all in humps and ridges, and we can't get pieces to fit——"

"You come along of I," repeated Gearge; "you can't do naught with stuff like that. O yes, 'twill all dig in foine for the borders. Chopped turf for roses is the grandest stuff you can give un. But

for turfing ! Lawks a mussy, whoever saw stuff like that ! ”

I sat back on my heels and looked at the great sods of earth, with grass on the top, which Tim and Neddy had supplied us with. The lumps were very thick, and about a foot square, and the grass upon the upper side was very long and coarse. But we had been setting these sods round the sun-dial with great zeal and energy, trying to think we should soon have a lawn here, a little circle of turf such as we had seen in Aunt Isabel's garden picture. We had been quite excited over the turf-laying, and disposed to be very much pleased with our handiwork, till Gearge's voice over our heads, and some rather frank remarks on his part had opened our eyes to its imperfections.

“ Now, just you clear away all them lumps of mess,” quoth Gearge, “ and I'll go and get the turfing irons, and ask Mr. Miles if he can spare us a mite of turf wheer they'm goin' to cut a bit of the old bowling green for the new azalea border. Happen he'll be pleased to give it to ee. I'll go and see, and if you get that all raked down neat and smooth again, then you'll see as how turf is laid proper ! ”

Dimples looked rather dismal as the boys set to

work to demolish all our yesterday's toil ; but they seemed rather to relish the job.

" It did look so beastly ! " Gordon cried ; " that young Tim, I guess he's too small to cut turf ; and he's only got a broken old thing to do it with. He said he was afraid it wasn't up to much, and it isn't. But if Gearge will show us the right way, why we'll have it done over again in a jiffey ! "

Gearge returned with a beaming face, and some tools and a garden line in his hands.

" You come along of I," he repeated ; " we'll do things proper, we will, this time ! Us'll show 'em a thing or two ! Ho ! ho ! ho ! "

In great excitement we followed Gearge down to a portion of the Squire's garden that was new to us. There was an immense long green, as smooth as velvet, from end to end ; and it was bordered by low walls over which roses clambered, rather beaten down by the rain now, but still quite lovely. At each end there was a great mass of shrubs and bushes, not in bloom, so we scarcely knew what they were ; and in front of one of these plantations a line had been drawn, and we soon understood that here it was that the turf was to be peeled off, in order to make the plantation wider.

" Squire, he be having a power of things comin'

over from furrain parts," Gearge explained; "he do be a wunnerful man for that, allus thinkin' of some'at new for his garden. And as them rosydendrom things grows moighty well here, he's goin' to clap un into this 'ere border, and some of the turf is got to be peeled off. Now you see how that's done, and we'll make a better job of it next time!"

We watched eagerly what Gearge would do. First he took his garden line, and gave one end to Gordon and kept the other himself. He set it first very near the edge of the earth border, and then he took one of his tools, a queer sharp thing, like a half moon, very sharp, fastened spade-wise to a handle, and with it he cut a straight line through the turf just by the garden cord which he used as a guide. The narrow edge by the border he just tossed away with a spade, and then we had one sharp clean edge to work from. Then the garden line was moved a foot on, another cutting was made by it, after which Gearge got another tool, one with a bigger half moon, quite as sharp, but set at right angles to its handle, and with this he cut away the turf from underneath, as you might peel off the almond icing from a cake with a sharp knife, just slipping it along. The ground, soft from the rain, cut beautifully, almost like cake; and

so he soon had a long, thin slice loose from the ground below. After that he made little cuts across it, about a yard apart, and then he rolled up each yard-long turf into a little roll, and lifted it into his barrow that stood by.

"I say, how jolly!" cried Gordon. "I've seen fellows turfing a cricket pitch like that! But I never guessed how it was done. I say, can we try!"

Gearge scratched his head and grinned.

"You'd best let oi cut you a few to go on with. It ain't just as easy as it looks to go even and steady!"

This the boys proved for themselves later; but it was fascinating work watching Gearge cut the turfs so deftly; and he was very good-natured about letting Gordon and Roger learn, though they spoiled a good many turves before they were able to cut one properly.\*

"That don't matter," he said, "us allus wants a power of odds and ends turfing, to fill up holes and get things ship-shape. Us'll go along now and make a start. Happen Oi can larn ee how to lay un, whilst I go on cutting un for ee. Mr. Miles, he said as how Oi moight do that, seein' as it was the Squire's wish to get the turf cut off proper."

It was hard work wheeling the barrow of turves. Gordon and Roger pulled with ropes like a pair of horses in front, and Gearge had the handles and pushed behind, and Dimples ran behind and pushed him, and he told her it was a powerful deal of a help to him. Gearge was always so kind to Dimples, and she was sure she helped him over everything he did.

Then when we had got the turves to our garden, we found that there was a great deal to be thought of in the laying. We had got the ground pretty even ; but of course there were little ups and downs, and holes and ridges ; and though the turves looked so even and nice, they were not quite alike either. So we had to have a barrow of soil and to put spadefuls down as Gearge directed us under this or that bit of the turf he was laying ; or scoop it out in some other place, and always be sure it lay smooth and even before going on to another.

Gearge seemed to us almost fussy at first as to how each turf went down ; but soon we began to see he was quite right ; for if you left a little hole the grass went into it in a little dip, and you couldn't get it to look nice, though you could sometimes beat and pat down a place where a little hump had been left. It was like piecing a map

together, only more interesting really. We worked on and on the whole day, and at the end we had the joy of seeing the circle complete.

Gearge had become so interested that he could not tear himself away ; and I'm sure we could not have done it without him. I hoped very much that it was not cheating ; but Gearge only grinned when we asked him about that, and he said he was "main sure" as the Squire would not mind. Mr. Miles had given him leave to see us through the job ; and even as he was speaking Cubbie set up a shout ; for there was Miles himself, standing not so very far away, and looking at our work with a kindly smile on his weather-beaten face. We all ran up to appeal to him.

"It was so kind of you to give us the turf, and to spare us Gearge. And he is so clever, and knows such a lot ! Only we're so afraid perhaps it isn't quite fair ; because, you see, we were to do the work ourselves ! "

"Yes, yes, I know all about that. But there's no one can do a thing afore they've learned how. Squire, he is no ways unreasonable, and he thinks a deal of learning the right ways of doing things. There, I'll tell you some'at as perhaps I shouldn't. 'Twas I meself that came here yester evening after

you'd left, and saw what you was after ; and I went to the Squire and I said, ' Them young ladies and gen'lemen are going to make a tidy pretty job of that there bit o' garden ; but there's some things as they can't do without they knows how ; and it'll do 'em good to larn, if you'm willing to spare them Gearge for to show un.' And Squire, he looked hard at me and he says, says he, ' They really are working, Miles ? They mean business, do they ? ' ' Bless you, sir,' says I, ' they'm be there morning, noon and night. I'd never ha' believed meself as little uns could work so fair and steady and have such pretty fancies——'"

"O Miles, did you say that ? How nice of you ! "

" That I did, missie, and I knew by the face of un that Squire were pleased. And he said, ' You're in the right of it, Miles, and if so be as it's work with them and not just playing and messing, Gearge shall help un all they needs. But they must work, too, work with un, not just look on,' and that I told to Gearge when I sent un along."

" And we did work, didn't we, Gearge ? " cried Cubbie. " Gordon and Roger cut a lot of the turfs presently, and I know how too, though I'm not just big enough yet to make the knife go nicely.

But I can spade in the earth as you lay them, and pat them flat afterwards. And we all know now just how turfing is done, don't we ? "

Gearge gave us an excellent character for industry, and it was Miles himself who superintended the cutting round of the circle very carefully with the sharp edging tool, so that it was all beautifully clean and accurate. Then he looked at the way we had marked out the little paths, and approved them on the whole. He told the boys not to put down any gravel upon them until the borders between had been well dug, which they could be now. He made each boy, I mean Gordon and Roger, do a little digging under his eye, to see that they knew how to handle the spade, and he agreed with Gearge in saying that all the lumps of turfy soil which Tim had been bringing down all day would be fine stuff to dig in, and that when the digging and gravelling was all done, the planting could begin.

" For once September comes in with rain, we can get along on the ground in these parts. And I'll send along a load of dung to be thrown down yonder, and Gearge, he'll tell you how to use it, and what plants need most ; and soon I'll be pulling to pieces some of my long borders, and if

little missie will say what she's a fancy for most, well, we'll see what we can spare!"

We were a happy party as we trooped home that evening; and next morning, when we got up, no Gordon and Roger appeared for breakfast; but a little bit of paper lay on the table that said—

"We've gone off to begin digging, it's such a scrumptious fine morning. Bring us some grub along when you come."

I was not quite sure whether Aunt Susanna would approve of the boys going off like that before prayers; so I told Aunt Isabel first in a whisper, and she explained to Aunt Susanna, who looked at us over her spectacles, and said—

"Well, my dear, I would rather that the boys had asked leave first; but I am glad that they are interested in their work, and we know that when the season is breaking up it is important to make use of all fine hours. There is a proverb I told you of before which tells us 'Laborare est orare'—'To labour is to pray'; so we will hope and believe that we are all joining in prayer together."

As we walked happily along to our garden later, with a rather extra heavy basket slung on a stick between us, Dimples remarked thoughtfully—

"I fink that Latin seems to be a very good language ; it's always about praying ! "

When we reached our destination Cubbie gave a whoop of joy, and really there was reason ! How the boys had worked ! The little patches of digging which had been done overnight to show Miles just how they were going to work, had grown and increased most astonishingly. Gordon had taken one side and Roger the other, and they must have been working like Trojans for quite a long time. There were four biggish pieces to dig, radiating out from the turf centre, and intersected by the little paths. Gravel paths were to run all round, and then on the top side was the gazebo with the lavender and "yarb" border, at the bottom of the rockery ; on one side the tumbling water, and on the other the long and rather narrow border for shrubs or rhododendrons, or anything we could find to fill it.

This had not been touched as yet ; the boys were digging the borders for the roses which I wanted to have round the sun-dial. Whilst the toilers fell upon the breakfast we had brought them, we made good all the stone edgings for the paths and raked them over ready for gravelling as soon as the digging should be done. Never were workers

more happy than we to-day, and the work now seemed to progress by leaps and bounds. At noon, when we broke off to picnic in the gazebo, the four bits of ground were practically ready for planting, and the heap of gravel collecting at the top had reached quite respectable dimensions. Tim and Neddy were toiling steadily to and fro, and though each load was inconsiderable, there is a wise Scotch proverb which tells how "Many mickles make a muckle"; and so we were proving it to be.

"Hallo!" suddenly cried a familiar voice at no great distance from us, and we all turned to look

Roger's face flushed, and a scowl showed on his brow, but he said never a word. It was Cocky who stood a little way off, regarding us somewhat sheepishly, as though he wasn't quite sure of his reception; and I didn't feel at all sure of it myself. I wished he had not come, to spoil our nice day. At least, it would be spoiled if the boys began to quarrel.

"O, so it's you," spoke Gordon, in a non-committal manner; "how's your arm, Cocky?"

"Roight and foin it be now. I could play cricket again, so I could; but I've come 'ere to-day 'cause my feyther sent I."

"What for?" asked Gordon.

"Why, to 'pologise to Master Roger for sure! I'm to say as I'm main sorry, and so I be. I didn't ought to a fought quality. That's flat; but he gave I what for! Sure and certain 'e did!" and Cocky grinned somewhat ruefully at the recollection of the chastisement he had received.

The cloud passed from Roger's face.

"O, that's all right," he said somewhat hastily. "I think it was I began it, in a way. Come and have a snack to eat, and tell us about the fair!"

And so peace was made with Cocky, who had come with more to say, we found.

"I was a-tellin' feyther about this 'ere gazzybo," he said—Cocky never got nearer than that to the right pronunciation of the funny word—"and 'e says as how I may have as much of that there rubbidge of ourn as I want. I've cut a good dollop o' fuzzy stuff; and I'll bring un along to-morrow and make a start, if so be as you'll let I."

He looked round at us, and then let his gaze rest particularly on Dimples, whose special property the gazebo was regarded, as she always kept it in order, and arranged our stores here, and swept it out diligently every morning.

I had expected to see Dimples all agog at this

offer ; but instead of answering she sat looking very gravely at Cocky, and he got redder and redder under her steady gaze.

"I don't fink I want Cocky to do the gazebo," she said at last ; "but I'm very much obliged to Blacksmith Cocksedge all the same."

Cocky looked dreadfully crestfallen, and I said to Dimples rather reproachfully—

"O, but, darling, that is not being quite kind."

"I don't fink so, I don't want to be unkind ; but Cocky hates poor little Tim. He said he stole apples. He calls him a 'hang-gallus,' which isn't at all a nice name, and perhaps they would fight again if Cocky was here. Tim has to come, we want him ; besides we've got a—a—contract with him ; but we can do without Cocky. Tim wants to be a good boy ; but I don't know what Cocky wants."

Then Cocky got up and stood before our small judge.

"I tell ee, missie, I won't never lay a finger on un again, that I won't ; nor I won't never call he hang-gallus again ! I've heard tell as how he helped to save the match o' Saturday. I tell ee, come next year, I'll put un in the team, see ef I don't. I'd be glad enough to make friends with he. You

don't need to be feared of no more fighting. Honour bright ! Trust I for that ! ”

Dimples' face cleared as though a sunbeam had touched it.

“ O, then you may come, Cocky ; and you may make the roof of the gazebo with your rubbridge and fuzzy. I daresay Tim will help too. He's very clever ; and it will be nice for you being friends.”

Cocky was mightily uplifted. That afternoon he stayed with us, and he worked like a galley-slave, as Roger told him. He began at the top end of the long border down the other yew hedge, and then when the manure cart came he helped the boys to spread it over their borders and dig it in.

Dimples did not much like this part of the work, and it did smell rather nasty ; but the boys didn't seem to mind and I knew it would make the plants grow better.

When Tim arrived with another load, he and Cocky stared at one another for a moment, and then Cocky slapped Tim on the back and cried—

“ Well done, young 'un. I know all about it. You'll make a man one of these days. Come along and help with this 'ere stuff ! ”.

And so the truce was made, and Tim set to and

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toiled with the rest of us ; and Dimples and I looked at one another and smiled, whilst Cubbie cried out enraptured—

“ I say, isn’t our work just prospering to-day ? ”

And I thought that Dimples’ work of peace-making was prospering too,

## CHAPTER XVI

### SUNSHINE AND SHADOW

I NEVER could have understood without our garden to work for, what lovely stuff rain is! At home we had rather grumped on wet days, especially when the summer was coming to an end. We used to say it was not "fair" for it to rain then. Winter was the time for that, when one could not be out often, and the rain did not matter so much.

But now we were learning what a splendid thing it was for heavy rain to come early in the autumn after a dry, hot summer. Everything looked so happy; everybody was so glad! Farmers were all saying that the "roots" would do now, and that they would have some "keep" again for their cattle. We had neither roots nor keep to think of, only just a garden; yet we were so glad of the

rain, and it did us such a lot of good, that it taught me a lesson I have never forgotten since, which is, never to grumble at the weather. If something comes which you do not like, because it interferes with your pleasures, try and think of other people who may be rejoicing in it, and do not be selfish or discontented. Of course, it is possible to have too much sunshine and dry weather, or too much rain ; but grumbling is not the way to mend matters. In times of necessity God-fearing people can unite in prayer to God to send us such weather as the country at large needs, and it is wonderful how such prayers are answered, as I have noted through a course of many years. But growling and grumbling because our out-door games or amusements are interrupted, is both foolish and wrong. And God Himself has compared the rain as well as the sunlight to His grace and mercy to men. Let us always try to remember that.

Well, in our garden, how things did go ahead ! The softened ground was easy to dig now that the stones had all been gradually cleared away. We reaped the reward of a great deal of tiresome work earlier on, which never had seemed at the time to make any great show. Three big boys and two small ones at work together made that work

fly, and soon came the exciting moment when the planting was to begin !

Aunt Isabel started us with a whole quantity of little wee rose cuttings—with roots—and a good number of small bushes. Aunt Isabel loves her roses, and I'm sure they loved her too ; for every little slip she put in seemed to grow. She showed us quite a number of little plantations she had in different parts of the garden, where she had put in rose-cuttings at different times, and she said she would be glad to let us have quite a great many. So many grew that she never wanted them all—or nearly all ; but she never could help putting more in when she cut in her roses. She showed us how to take them up carefully, so that their roots were not too much disturbed ; but she made us do it all ourselves. Dimples and I did most of that work. We had Neddy and the little cart, and we went backwards and forwards with our spoil. There were other things besides the roses ; pieces of what Aunt Isabel called "herbaceous" plants, like the big flaming poppy, which had just been going by on our arrival, and others with long funny names that we found it hard to remember. Then Aunt Isabel said that pansies and violas growing amongst the roses round the sun-dial would look very pretty,

and she gave us a lot of little plants, which, I suspect, she had meant for her own garden when she grew them. And we were so pleased and proud of the look of our rose garden as we put our treasures carefully in. To be sure there were no blossoms. We should have to wait till next year for that, at least, the Squire would ; but when you begin to have a garden to make, you learn how to care for the plants and things before ever they think of blossoming. No one knows till they try how interesting it is just to watch them grow when they are quite tiny, and to picture what they are going to be like by-and-bye.

Then Miles had us down when he was dividing his big herbaceous plants in his big borders ; and soon we found that he had more to give us than our garden could possibly hold.

" You want a long straight border for the herbaceous plants, missie," he said ; " mostly us avoids straight lines in a garden, but for these here herbaceous borders there's nothing like it, as you can see for yourself."

We did see, very well, Dimples and I, and ran back to our garden to ask the boys if our one long border, which ran parallel to one of the yew hedges, could not be made wider and filled with herbaceous

plants instead of the rhododendrons, as the boys had planned.

They all thought this would be capital, and set to work widening the border a good bit. Tim went to and fro bringing up the plants in the little cart, as Dimples and I made our selection. It was just splendid to see how that border filled up. If it hadn't been that Miles had warned us not to put our plants too near together, we should have stuffed them in a good bit too close. It made such a show done that way ; but we took his advice, and even then it was quite splendid to see how like a real garden border ours looked, and what an air it gave to the garden. There were quite a good many flowers that went on blooming. Miles said they would like being up on the hillside, where they got more sunshine, and where it was not so moist for their roots.

"They'll do best with me through the summer," he said, "but spring and autumn they'll like being up there."

Cocky was gravelling the paths for all he was worth. They did look so nice and yellow ! And they seemed to set off the green of the grass, the dark earth of the borders, and the stone edgings we had put to mark them round.

Our pride and joy in our handiwork increased by leaps and bounds. We had not as yet asked anybody to come and see it, and now we were glad of this ; for we felt that when the time had come, we should really take our friends by surprise. To be sure, we had had a good deal of unexpected help. Gearge was a real man, and though he had not come so very much, when he did help us, he helped in a very masterly way. But Tim and Cocky had done a great deal all the while through, which of course made a vast difference. The Squire had not minded. We had not done anything unfair for our bargain. And now there only remained the lavender and "yarb" border at the top to plant, and the garden would be finished !

The boys suggested, and we thought it an excellent plan to have the rhododendrons planted in a sort of hedge at the back of these two borders, and in front of the gazebo in a sort of half-moon, to hide some of the shabby wall. We had planted creepers against it ; but they had not had time to grow. Tim and Cocky, with Roger to help them, had patched up a sort of roof with wood and some light corrugated iron and a lot of heather and furze and stuff. Dimples thought it was "simply lovely," and it looked pretty and picturesque from outside ;

but it was only moderately weather-tight, and there was a good deal of dripping through in wet weather. But after all, that did not matter so very much ; because in wet weather nobody wanted to use it. One corner was quite dry where we kept our things, and for the rest we did not much care.

Seedling rhododendrons were to be found all over a certain wood near by on the Squire's property, and soon we had all we wanted for our purpose. Ferns for the rockery and rock plants we had long been collecting, and since the rain the "Alpine garden," as we rather ambitiously called it, had worn quite a festive appearance.

Then came a day when Dimples and I walked with Mother Goose and her solemn gander round her quaint little garden, collecting all the treasures she had for us. She seemed to know her plants just by the feel of them, and it was hard to believe she could not see, as she took them up so deftly, and told us just how to carry and plant them.

She had such interesting stories to tell about them, too ; and her lavender was just delicious !

She was so clever with her fingers that she could make up with tiny narrow ribbon, things that she called "lavender bottles." They were like a

bottle in shape, the stalks being the long necks, and the bulge being made of the scented part, which, of course, was a good deal fatter. She sold her lavender bottles to be put with handkerchiefs. But she gave us several, and would not be paid. I wanted her to take some of our money for her plants ; and I told her that we really had plenty, and that the Squire was going to give us something for "out-of-pocket" expenses. But she would not have it.

"The ladies from Abbess Well have been that good to I ; there's nothing I wouldn't do for any as belongs to them ! " she said. Indeed, we were learning more and more how much the people all round loved and reverenced our aunts. We never exactly knew when they did all the good things we heard about ; they certainly never talked about it. Some time, a good while, afterwards, when Dimples and I were reading in our Bible about not letting "your right hand know what your left hand does," she looked up at me and said—

"That's like Aunt Susanna and Aunt Isabel, isn't it ? "

These September days were very full of sunshine for us, even the wet ones, when the rain fell in slanting bars and there could be no getting out to

the garden. We used to think then how splendidly all our newly-planted things would be thriving ; for the rain was warm and soft and kindly, not like the cold, sleety, biting rain of spring. And the accounts of Papa's convalescence were gradually getting more satisfactory. He had had several relapses ; but seemed now to have turned the corner. Still, all this long illness had been very costly for them, and we very well understood that the sea trip recommended would scarcely be possible for them unless—unless—O, happy thought ! we could send them the money for it !

And we could ! We were confident of that now !

We really had achieved the task. The garden was almost fit to be shown to the Squire. There were still a few little things to be done to finish off ; but we were every day more proud and delighted with our handiwork—more confident that our elders would be pleased and satisfied too.

So for us the sun seemed to shine every day. There were seldom any real disagreements ; and if sometimes the boys differed, and for a moment Gordon's hot temper flared up, he much more quickly came round again ; and Roger had really been very nice, and had not said things to irritate him, as he used to do, so that the quarrel soon

ended. The garden had helped to make us all better friends than ever.

One evening, as we were all trooping home together, Tim looked up at the sky and said—

“It’s going to thunder, I do b’lieve ! ”

It had been a very warm day, and the sun had a funny coppery look about it as it went down. The air was very still, and in the east great clouds that Dimples called “cauliflowers” were rising up, partly white and partly tinged with the same sort of copper-coloured light.

“Good thing it didn’t come afore the rain,” Cocky remarked, “us gets proper storms when they do come ; and if the fuzzy and stuff had abin set alight last month, we’d have had a proper tidy fire ! ”

“What would have made the fire, Cocky ? ” asked Dimples with interest.

“Why, the lightning for surē, missie. We get it bad times and again in Crickle Abbot. Feyther’s forge was once set alight ; but that were afore I can remember.”

“There’s trees in the wood struck dead,” said Tim ; “I’ll show you some day. I saw one struck one time. Lawks ! how it did split and shiver ! It toppled over the night after. It might ‘a’ fell

on we in our hut ; but it went t'other way. I was that scared as I heerd it go ! ”

The storm beat up against the light breeze all that evening, and by bed-time there were little grumblings of thunder and twinkling flashes of lightning all round us. But after we were in bed and had been asleep some time, the storm broke in all its fury ; Aunt Isabel came hastening to our room in her dressing wrapper to make sure we were not frightened. We were glad to have her through the next half-hour, for really it was rather awful ; the flash and the crash seemed to come together ; and we remembered what Tim had said about the trees in the wood by his hut. And there were lots of trees round our house too.

But presently the storm rumbled away into the distance, and Aunt Isabel kissed us and tucked us up afresh and went away. Dimples whispered after she had gone—

“ I fink Aunt Isabel was praying whilst she sat on our bed. Did you see how she looked ? ”

“ If she was, I expect she was praying that God would take care of us ; and, you see, He has.”

“ I fink Aunt Isabel is very good,” said Dimples. “ I fink God listens whenever she asks Him anyfing.”

Then we went to sleep and slept very soundly,

and in the morning they did not awake us at the usual time, because we had been disturbed in the night. So we were not quite dressed when a message came up to us that Ben Cocksedge, the blacksmith's son, was down below, and wanted very much to speak to us.

"I'll go!" cried Gordon, who was just finishing his toilet; "I wonder what he wants!"

"Hope nothing's wrong with the hatch," said Roger, who had kept it half shut since the rainy weather began, so as not to have too much water rushing down.

We were all rather anxious lest something should have happened to the garden; only we did not exactly see why Cocky should have gone there so early. Of course, he was interested in it; but he had never done such a thing before.

Roger had rushed down after Gordon, and we scurried through our dressing as fast as we could. We heard one of the boys coming back just as we had finished, all but our prayers.

"I say," spoke Roger's voice at the door, "such a horrid thing! Let me in!"

He came in with a grave, troubled face; my thoughts flew instantly to the garden—

"O Roger, has there been another cloud-burst?"

Has our garden been spoiled before the Squire has seen it ? ”

“ O, no, it’s not that ; it’s little Tim ! ”

“ O, what, Roger ? ”

“ He’s been hurt—awful hurt—burnt—knocked about. Cocky says he’ll die ! ”

“ O Roger, no ! no ! ” cried Dimples, with tears in her voice.

“ O Roger, tell us more ! ”

“ It was last night. It was the storm—the lightning. It set fire to a house on the green.”

“ But Tim doesn’t live on the green.”

“ No, but he went to see. Everybody was there, Cocky and all. It was that queer old house with funny windows, that we like so much. It’s all wood, and it was struck by lightning, and was in a blaze. Lots of people were trying to get the things out for the people. Cocky ran in himself and threw things down from a window. Then they yelled to him, and he saw the fire behind him. He was going to jump out ; but somehow he got too choked, and he fell down inside the room. Nobody could get at him, they thought, because the stairs were gone, and the long ladder hadn’t come.”

“ O Roger ! how awful ! but Cocky is here ! ”

“ Yes, yes, a pretty object too ; but they can’t

keep him in bed. Nobody knows how Tim scrambled up—he can climb like a cat, as we know ; but there he was ; he scrambled in at the window, and hauled Cocky up and over the sill, and bundled him down to the men below, who caught him. And then they shouted to him to tumble out too, and so he did ; but it was just as the roof fell in, blazing, over him ; and everybody had to rush back for a moment. They got Tim out very quickly, and they carried him across to Cocky's house ; but the doctor says he can't get better, he's going to die of it—soon ! ”

Roger's face twitched a little ; Dimples was weeping softly. I could scarcely understand all in a moment that our useful, active, bright little Tim could be in such a sorrowful plight.

“ I wish you'd come and see Cocky,” said Roger. “ He's so awfully cut up. He said he had to come to us ; he can't bear himself alone ; and nobody seems to understand 'how he feels about Tim. You see, in the village——”

I knew very well that the village boys always hooted Tim, and that this was mainly because Cocky had set himself against him at one time.

Since they had become friends over the garden Cocky's enmity had ceased ; but most likely that of the village boys had not changed.

As I ran downstairs after Roger, I was aware of Cocky's voice speaking between the gulps of dry sobs—

"I called un hang-gallus, I did. I set all the boys agin un. I had un chased off the green if ever he came there to watch. I was bad to he whenever I got a chance; and now 'twas he as got me out of the fire, and he's killed his own self over it!"

Gordon was standing twisting his hands together.

It is always very difficult for a boy to know what to say to anyone in trouble. Cocky was a dismal object to look at too; for his head was bound up and his face was blackened, and one arm was in a sling; but it was plain that restless misery had driven him out to find sympathy somewhere; and he had come to us, as being Tim's friends.

"O Cocky, we are so sorry!" I cried.

Then Cocky began<sup>o</sup> to cry, regularly to blubber, as boys call it. I thought perhaps it would do him good. I know girls feel better after a good cry, when everything has gone wrong.

Then a little soft voice spoke in our midst—

"I fink the best thing we can all do, is just to pray for little Tim." •

## CHAPTER XVII

### POOR LITTLE TIM

WE had not the heart for the garden that day. Whilst we had our breakfast upstairs, Cocky was given coffee and bacon in the kitchen, and told his tale all over again there. Aunt Susanna and Aunt Isabel must certainly have heard the story of the fire last night ; for at prayers Aunt Susanna made a little pause in her reading of the customary form for the day, with which we were now familiar, and she added some words of her own, first thanking God for having saved the village from the perils of fire last night, and then praying for one who lay stricken and in peril of death, that he might be supported and comforted, and in God's good time, and in God's own way, be raised up again to do Him service.

Dimples snuggled closer up to me as these words were spoken, and she whispered very, very softly—

"I'm certain sure Aunt Susanna means little Tim. I'm sure God always hears her when she prays."

We all felt comforted, I think, as we rose from our knees ; and Gordon said directly—

"May we go and see where the fire was last night, and how Tim is getting on ? "

"I was going to suggest that myself," spoke Aunt Susanna ; whilst Aunt Isabel added—

"Cook is putting together a few little things that may be useful, some jelly and a little chicken broth, and a little bottle of the cordial the people like so much when they are ill and feverish. You can take it with you, dears."

"O, thank you, Auntie ; and may we—may we—I mean, if the doctor says so—may we go and see poor little Tim ? "

Aunt Isabel hesitated a moment, and looked at Aunt Susanna, who said at once—

"If the doctor approves your going in, and you wish to see him, you may do so—for a few minutes. But you must remember that when you visit the sick, you must not tire them or excite them by talking, even to say kind things. You must be very quiet, and say very little."

"O yes, Aunt Susanna, I think we know about

that; because we always had to be very quiet when we went to see Papa."

"I used to talk to Papa most," said Dimples, with a certain simple pride. "He said it rested him. Perhaps I can rest Tim too."

"Perhaps you can, darling, we will see. I hope you may find poor little Tim better than Ben thinks."

We saw now what a great thing it had been with our garden to do what Gearge called "take time by the fore-leg." We could quite well spare a day away; for everything was very well forward now; and it would have been very hard to work there not knowing what was happening to poor little Tim, and without either of our regular helpers.

Cocky looked rather in better trim when we started out. Nurse had washed his blackened face much better than anybody else had had time to do, and had bound up his burns much more cleverly and comfortably; and he had made a good meal, and looked altogether more like himself, though his face was still partly red and partly black, and swollen alike from tears and from the effects of the fire.

As we approached the village green, we saw a good many people collected there, all the inhabitants, in fact, except such as had to go to work. There

was still a sullen-looking column of smoke rising up in the sunny air, and the people had chiefly gathered together about the smouldering ruins of what had once been a pretty and quaint-looking old house.

A great heap of furniture was standing out in the middle of the green, with a rick-cloth thrown over it. There were two men in shiny brass helmets standing near the smoking heap.

"They sent for the fire brigade in Market Priors ; but they never came in time. It were too far off," said Cocky. "Besides, there wasn't no water anywise near, not enough to be any good. The old house burnt like tinder, so un did ! My ! it were like an oven inside, and no mistake ! "

"It was very brave of you to go in, Cocky," I said. "Weren't you afraid ? "

"I dunno as I thought about it. Lots of chaps was rushin' in to get the stuff out. I went along of they. But they ran one way and I ran another, and the smoke it got down your eyes and throat and muddled you. That was how I came to be left behind when the rest of un yelled out and took to their heels. And then I thought it was all up with me unless I could get to the window ; and then I don't mind nothing more till they telled me

as Tim had dropped down from somewhere and flung I out of the window somehow. I dunno how he could ha' done it, a little bit of a chap like that!"

"He's very strong," said Dimples. "He carries me about and lifts me up on Neddy's back. O, poor Neddy! what will he be doing? Has anybody been to tell him, and give him anything to eat?"

"O, Neddy's all right; he lives on the common; he isn't shut up this time of year. He never wanders far," answered Roger, who had often visited the Tinker's hut in his absence, and was well acquainted with the life that Tim led there; "he'll be missing Tim, perhaps; but he's used to Tim being away pretty often. O, here comes the doctor's gig. Now we'll soon hear how poor little Tim is getting along."

The doctor drove straight up to the forge, and disappeared into the blacksmith's house. Several women moved off to that spot after him, and a couple of them followed into the house. Cocky had told us that his "feyther's sister" had come over at dawn on hearing that there was trouble at her brother's place, and had assumed the charge of Tim.

"Her be a powerful good un with sick folks," Cocky further explained. "Her goes out nussing

half her time. Tim ull be all right along of her, if so be——”

Cocky choked there, and did not finish the sentence ; Dimples looked at him with a sweet gravity, and said—

“ You came in to prayers, Cocky ; didn’t you hear what Aunt Susanna asked God about little Tim. He’s sure to do it. I’m not a bit afraid.”

Cocky had come in to prayers behind the servants ; but I rather think he had been too much awed by his surroundings and the unwonted and unfamiliar ceremony to pay much heed to spoken words. Still, Dimple’s confidence seemed re-assuring to him, and he said eagerly—

“ Do you mean as he’ll get the better of it, missie ? ” And Dimples answered with the utmost confidence—

“ I’m certain sure he will ! ”

As there was nothing much to see now of the burnt-out house, except that pile of blackened, smoking timbers, we moved across towards the forge, before which the doctor’s gig still stood. The two men at work within could not tell us much about Tim ; only that he was “ mortal bad,” and that the blacksmith had gone up with the doctor.

I heard a woman’s voice speaking to a neighbour—

"He can't last the day, and a blessing for him, too!" she said. "With that father and that home, what chance was there for the poor child? And if so be as he did pull through, he'd be no better than a cripple all his days. They say as he's hurt something fearful, both legs crushed and broken under them timbers, and burnt something shocking too!"

Before I had quite taken in the tragedy of all this, the doctor was seen coming out.

"He knows he can't do nothin'," spoke another woman's voice; and I saw that the doctor's face, generally so cheery and bright, was looking very grave.

As his eyes lighted upon us, however, I thought his face cleared somewhat.

"Ah, here they all are, I do believe. Are you not the little girls who have been so kind to that poor lad in there?"

"Tim has been helping us with our garden," I answered. "I think it is he who has been kind."

"O ah, that garden, I have heard of that! One day I must come and see it. But the little lad is asking over and over again for 'little missie; little missie,' I think he must mean you, my dear."

"Or Dimples perhaps. Dimples has Tim on

Sunday for a lesson. He has been three Sundays now. He likes it."

"Then perhaps that's it. Will you be afraid to go and see him? He does not look dreadful. His face is scarcely burned at all. The fall of the beams just saved his head. But the rest of his poor little body—"

"O, please tell me, does it hurt him very badly?"

It was Dimples who put this question, and the doctor answered kindly and gravely—

"Thank God there is no pain now. That is all gone. He is very weak and wanders a little. But he asks always for 'little missie.' He wants to be told something again. If you would not be afraid, my dear, to go to him—"

"I'm not a bit afraid of Tim," answered Dimples; "we came to see him if you would let us. May I talk to him if he likes it. I don't want to do him any harm."

"You will not do him any harm, my dear; you can say whatever you wish."

Dimples looked up at me and smiled, as we went on into the house behind Cocky.

"He isn't so ill as Papa used to be," she whispered. "I'm so glad he's getting better so fast!"

I think I understood better than Dimples what the doctor really meant ; but I could not be sure and I would not say it to Dimples. We followed Cocky up a narrow steep sort of staircase, with wooden walls on both sides, and then into a big attic room under the roof, with several little dormer windows looking different ways. You could see right out over the green from one, beside which the bed had been drawn up, so that the cool air could blow upon Tim as he lay.

We saw his big, eager eyes fixed upon us as we came towards him. His face was not much changed, except that it looked so small and pinched, and all the colour had gone out of it, as it goes out of the sky after sunset, leaving it white and ashy-looking ; but I could see that all the bed-clothing was held off him by some cradle arrangement, which gave the bed a curious look, almost as though some very big man lay there, instead of a small boy.

" Little missie," said Tim's voice, " do'ee tell I again about—He ; Him as said the children might come to He, when the other chaps wanted for to drive un away."

" O yes, Tim, I know, you mean Jesus. What I was telling you on Sunday."

" That's it, missie. My yed be all of a muzz.

I can't seem to get hold on un roight. Tell me again about He."

Dimples sat upon the side of the bed. I stood at the foot. I think the boys were huddled somewhere in the background by the door; but I did not look. Cocky came in and threw himself along the floor beside the low truckle-bed, and hid his face in the clothes.

Dimples, in the very simplest of child-language, told again to little Tim the outline of the life and death of Jesus. And he listened with his earnest gaze fixed on her face, as though trying to stamp the words firmly on his mind.

"I wish as He wasn't dead and gone, missie; maybe He'd 'a' come to me then, like He did to other sick folk."

Dimples wrinkled up her brow as she felt for an answer to meet this desire.

"He's not dead really, Tim; for He came alive again, and went up to God in heaven. And He's always here now, though we don't just see Him; but we can always come to Him. Nobody can't keep us away now. He's always the same, and He said His own self, 'Suffer the little children to come to Me.' You can go to Him, Tim, indeed you can!"

"And he won't call me a hang-gallus and shoo me away?"

A stifled sob broke from Cocky at this question, and Dimples answered earnestly—

"O no, Tim, he won't ever call you anything like that. He loves you; and He'd like for you to love Him, and go to Him."

"I'd like to go, if I knew how!" spoke Tim wistfully; "but I can't move hand nor foot!"

"That doesn't matter," spoke Dimples, looking at me to come to her aid. I thought Dimples told things to Tim much better than I could; but still I whispered to her in answer to her look of appeal.

"I fink perhaps we go to Jesus best when we pray," she said. "Tim, you've been learning how to pray, haven't you? You haven't forgotten the proper way?"

"Please help me!" pleaded Tim. "It's allus the old way that comes back; and it don't seem to mean nothin'."

For the jingling nonsense of Tim's version of the Lord's prayer had worried Dimples considerably; and she had been at some pains to teach him better, and to try and explain as well as she could the meaning of each brief, pregnant petition.

She folded her hands, and they said the prayer

together, Cocky joining in, in sobbing gasps ; and I think we all joined in, in our hearts.

Tim lay still after that for awhile with closed eyes ; but suddenly these flashed open and he said—

“ I’ve bin a bad boy about my feyther. I’ve hated him bad I have. Tell un I’m sorry, will ee, Cocky ? Tel’ un I’d like him to forgive I ; and I’ve forgiven he. I don’t know when he’ll be back ; but I shan’t never see un again.”

Cocky was howling in subdued fashion. Tim smiled almost proudly as he said—

“ Fancy you caring for a little hang-gallus like I ! ”

“ Don’t, Tim, don’t, I’m fit to cut my tongue out for ever sayin’ it of ee ! ”

“ I used to wonder if ever I’d be strong enough to whop ee, Cocky ! I never thought as you and I’d be friends. Ain’t it queer, me lyin’ ‘ere in your house, and all ? ”

Again he seemed for a moment to go off to sleep. Dimples looked at me with wide, wondering eyes. She was beginning dimly to apprehend some mystery too deep for her comprehension. She slipped her hand into mine and held it fast. She looked at Tim’s pinched, shadowy face with eyes filled with awe. I wondered if we ought to go away. Perhaps

I made a little movement ; for Tim suddenly looked at us with something of his old alertness of gaze.

" I'm sorry as I couldn't just finish that garden with ee. There's still some plants to bring down ; but Neddy ull do all that for ee." Then he stopped short and something of a troubled look crossed his face. " Poor old Neddy, I'd 'a' liked to have seen un again ! "

Cocky slipped silently from the room, and we heard him tumbling down the stairs ; but Tim's eyes were still on our faces.

" Will ee have Neddy, little missies ? I'd be main glad to give un to ee ? He's my very own, that he be. He don't belong no wise to feyther. I've took care of un, and taught un all he knows. Do ee take un, they do be so shameful cruel to donkeys. I'd not like to have Neddy knocked about as some be. Will ee have un, little missies ? "

" O Tim, we should love him !" answered Dimples eagerly ; and looked at me for confirmation.

" I think the Ladies will let him live at Abbess Well, Tim," I said. Our aunts always went by the name of " the Ladies " in Crickle Abbot and Crickle-thorpe. " We live in London ; we could not take him away with us ; but I'm almost sure they would like to have him to live in the orchard. I heard

them say one day that a donkey would be useful to draw Aunt Susanna about the village in winter, when she gets stiff and cannot walk."

Tim's eyes were eager and full of pleasure.

"I'd love for Neddy to go there. The Ladies are allus good to dumb beasts, and children, and all sorts of sickly folk——"

Again he seemed to lose the thread of his words, and rambled a little in his talk. Gordon came softly forward.

"I think we had better be going," he said softly.  
"I think Tim wants to go to sleep."

The bright eyes flashed open for a moment, and Tim said wistfully—

"I do be so mazed and queer. If little missie would say it once more for I. Our Father——"

"We will all say it for you, Tim," I said; and I knelt down by the bed, and so did Dimples and so did the boys. We said it all together, very slowly, and Tim's lips moved, as he followed to the end. When we rose he was smiling; but he looked wistful still.

"It be such a lot to say at once. And I be so mazed, and then I disremember it right——"

"I'll teach you my little wee prayer, Tim," said Dimples, "what Mumsey telled me when I was

very little and forgot the big long ones. I say it every night before I go to sleep. Tim, are you listening?"

"Yes, missie, so I be!"

Dimples folded her hands together; Tim could not follow this example, but he closed his eyes as she did—

"Come, Lord Jesus," she said.

"Come, Lord Jesus," repeated Tim; and then opening his eyes wide he asked, "Be that all?"

"Yes, Tim, that's all, just three words, 'Come, Lord Jesus.' You see Tim, if you fink you can't go to Him, you can just ask Him to come to you."

"And will He?"

"O, I *fink* so!" answered Dimples confidently; and as we stole from the room we left Tim with fast-closed eyes; but, I saw his lips just move, and I know that he was repeating again the words of Dimple's little short prayer—

"Come, Lord Jesus."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### LESSONS

**T**HAT night little Tim died ; and in the morning Aunt Isabel came and told us. We had finished breakfast, and were awaiting the summons to prayers when she came softly in with the news.

I had half expected it, and I know the boys had, by the sober way in which they ate their breakfast, and the way they talked in soft voices, without laughing and scuffling together. But Dimples had made up her mind that Tim was just going off into a nice sleep when we left him, and would awake "lots better." I saw the tears gather in her eyes as she understood the purport of Aunt Isabel's message ; and she said in a low, wondering voice—

"Then God didn't hear Aunt Susanna yesterday ! "

Aunt Isabel put a hand on Dimples' shoulder as she asked—

"What do you mean, my love?"

"I fought when Aunt Susanna asked God yesterday at prayers to make little Tim well that He'd be just *sure* to do it. I fought He always heard grown-ups!"

"So He does, my love; but He hears little children just as readily. We all prayed yesterday for little Tim. God has given us our answer. We must try and understand just what that answer means."

"I don't fink I understand," said Dimples. "If poor little Tim is dead, he can't never come alive again, to see our garden and do fings with us; and it doesn't seem quite as if God had heard us, unless He didn't quite understand!"

"Perhaps, darling, it was because God understood so much better than we can do what was for little Tim's good, that He came last night and took him away!"

"O!" suddenly spoke Dimples with a look of enlightenment. "Did Jesus really come?"

"Jesus is here with us always, love; as He was with little Tim. He heard our prayers, as He heard Tim's. Aunt Susanna askéd—can any of you remember what——?"

Roger was always good at remembering; he answered at once, "She asked that he might be

raised up to do God's service in His time and His way."

"Yes, dear boy, that was it. In His time and way; and I think it likely that the dear, loving Lord Jesus knew what a very hard fight Tim's little life would have been here below, and how very difficult it would have been for him to do God service in that life. He had a bad father, who had already taught him to swear, and who would later have taught him other bad ways; who beat him and ill-treated him, and gave him little chance of growing up a good lad——"

"But why couldn't God make Tim's father good?" asked Dimples, "instead of taking poor little Tim away?"

"Because, darling, God has given to each human soul the power of choice, whether for good or evil. He does not compel men to 'be good'—that would be making them into mere machines. That is not what God wants. He asks for our love and our obedience; but he does not take it by force. And because men for all these ages have chosen evil instead of good, this sad condition of things has grown up; and little children are led away into sin very, very young. But God knows all this. He will do right, He will be just. And very, very

often He will come and take a little child of His away out of it all, as He took little Tim last night."

Dimples heaved a long sigh.

"Then little Tim is in heaven, is he, Aunt Isabel, in heaven with the angels?"

"Little Tim, my love, is, I trust and believe, in that beautiful place of rest, that ante-chamber to heaven, which our dear Lord called Paradise. We know from His own lips that this beautiful Paradise is open to those who call on the Lord Jesus, even though their lives have been dark and stained by sin. The poor thief on the cross, who had been a wicked man, cried to Jesus, 'Lord, remember me.' Little Tim, who had grown up in much darkness and ignorance, prayed as he lay dying, 'Come, Lord Jesus!' so we may be quite sure that he is now in Paradise with Jesus; and we must try and be glad that he has been taken away out of the sorrow and suffering of this world, and that he will never fall into sin, or fall away from Jesus any more."

Dimples' face was very grave and intent.

"I'm glad Tim came those free Sunday afternoons, and learnt about Jesus, aren't you, Auntie?"

"Very glad, my dear."

Dimples twisted her hands together and presently said—

"But, Auntie, s'pose he hadn't come, s'pose he hadn't learnt to say, 'Come, Lord Jesus.' Would he not have gone to Paradise last night?"

"Darling, we cannot tell. God is our very loving Father, as well as our just Judge. We must leave these hard questions with Him. It is enough for us to see how He works for and by His children, in helping them towards the light. I often think that no human soul is left without some guiding and leading. God, through His messengers, His holy angels, is working, and watching us always, and helping us too. And we must try to help one another, not by preaching and teaching always, but by little acts of kindness and love——"

Aunt Isabel paused, and looking round at us all she added with her gentle smile—

"If you had begun to preach to Tim, to tell him he was a naughty, little, ignorant boy, and that he must try to be better and come to church and to Sunday School, he would most likely have run away from you and perhaps used bad words, and you might never have seen him any more. But you spoke to him kindly, and you let him help you with your garden, and you had him to play in the cricket match; and that made him love you, and want to please you. That is how God works in our

hearts—by love, and by gentle leading, not by hard driving."

I was quite, quite sure that Aunt Isabel was right; and I wondered how she knew so much about Tim. The boys of the village who were always telling him how bad he was, and who called him "hang-gallus," had never made him want to be better; but after he came about with us, and Cubbie and Dimples talked to him and told him things, and he got fond of us, then he had come to church, and come to the laundry to learn about Jesus from them. And if that were really the way God worked, to put things into our hearts like that, well, it was very wonderful; and I felt we ought to be very careful how we thought about things as we grew up. One has lots of ideas about being good and doing good; only most of our ideas seem wrong—at least, we are afraid to talk about them to grown-ups, lest they should laugh at us. I don't think I should have dared to ask Tim to come up for a Sunday lesson, for instance; but Dimples did, and the Aunts were so kind about it, and let him have tea in the laundry afterwards, and sing hymns with us. And now it seemed as though it had been God all the time! So you never know; and I think perhaps if you get ideas in

your head, it would be better sometimes to speak about them, if there is anybody who understands ; because good grown-up people can help you to know whether it is just a silly notion of your own, or whether it is something, perhaps, that God would like you to do.

"Aunt Isabel," suddenly broke in Dimples, "what about poor dear Neddy ? May we have him ? "

"Did he really belong to Tim? "

"He said so, and I'm sure he did ; and I don't want him to be beaten and starved by Tim's father when he gets back. He gived him to us, truly he did ! "

"I know, dear ; and if he really belonged to Tim, he had the right to give him away. Anyway I think he had better be brought here for the present. When the tinker gets back, we can speak to him about it. We could let him live in the orchard, where there is a little shed in the corner. And in the harness room you will find an old set of donkey harness, for we used to have the chair drawn by a donkey when I was ill for two years a long while ago. We have sometimes talked of getting another donkey ; and perhaps we can make Neddy useful. At any rate you may get him here, and we will think about it—"

"O Aunt Isabel," cried Cubbie eagerly, "may we learn how to harness and unharness him and make him draw the chair, in case Aunt Susanna liked to use it? Tim understood all about harness. He taught us a little; but I'd awfully like to know more!"

"I think that would be a very good plan. It is always well to learn as much as we can whilst we are young. We never know how useful such knowledge may be as we grow older."

"Come on!" cried Cubbie excitedly, "let's go and fetch Neddy home! I'm sure he'll be glad to come. He must be wondering awfully where Tim has got to!"

Dimples and I went with Cubbie to the tinker's hut across the common. The boys said they would go to the garden and finish off the gravelling. I did not feel like going there quite so soon. And Dimples and Cubbie were full of plans about Neddy, and all they were to do to comfort him.

I'm sure poor Neddy had missed Tim; for we heard him braying dismally long before we reached the place. He was not hungry or thirsty, for there was plenty of grass and a little pond close by; but he had missed Tim's company, and was wandering about as though looking for him. He seemed

very pleased to see us, and came up and rubbed his nose against us ; and when Dimples produced a crust of bread out of her pocket he munched it solemnly ; but he kept turning his head from side to side still, as though he was yet on the look-out for his little master.

"O poor Neddy, poor dear Neddy, he can't come any more !" Dimples told him, with her arms about his neck. " But you mustn't be sorry, Neddy, because he's happier with Jesus in Paradise than he was here. Aunt Isabel says so. And you're going to come home with us, and be happy too, Neddy dear, because you've been a very good donkey, and we won't let Tinker Tim knock you about. Aunt Susanna and Aunt Isabel are going to see about that. And we've come to fetch you, so that you may be in a nice place too."

Cubbie got the halter out of the shed and slipped it over Neddy's unresisting head. He was quite willing to come away with us ; indeed, he seemed pleased to be led off. As we crossed the common in our homeward way, we saw Cocky mooning about in a very dejected fashion, and as soon as he saw us he came towards us with more of purpose and briskness in his walk.

" What are you doin' with Neddy ? "

"Taking him home. Tim gave him to us. He's to live in the paddock, and perhaps to draw Aunt Isabel's chair, if Aunt Susanna thinks it would be a good plan."

Cocky stroked Neddy's long ears.

"I'm glad he's a-goin' to Abbess Well. Feyther, he would ha' given him a home; but he said as Tinker Tim would take him away first thing soon's he turned up agin. But if the Ladies have got un, he won't dare lay a finger on he agin. Neddy belonged to Tim, honest; he wasn't none of the old un's, everybody knew that."

"Cocky, do you understand about harness?" asked Cubbie. "Could you teach us how to get Neddy dressed?"

"Harness an old moke! Bless ee, yes! I can harness up our pony as well as feyther himself!"

"O, do come and show us then!" cried Cubbie eagerly, and Cocky desired nothing better.

It was a change of occupation and a change of ideas; and we were all the better for it. Neddy was very gentle and patient, and it wasn't really difficult to get the harness on him; but it was rather difficult to remember all about the straps at first, and we were the best part of two days

before we felt ourselves quite at home amongst them, and could get Neddy harnessed and put to rapidly, and without having to pause and discuss just what was the next thing to do.

Cocky was with us most of the time ; for he said he hated to be at home, with little Tim lying stiff and cold and silent up in the attic room. He couldn't work in the garden, for he wasn't strong enough yet, and he could only use one arm and hand ; but this was rather a good thing for us, as it prevented his doing everything himself with the straps ; he had to explain to us what to do, so we learned all the more quickly.

On the third day they buried poor little Tim, and Aunt Susanna let us all go and walk behind the coffin with Cocky. Tim's father was away, nobody knew where, and it didn't seem right that he should be buried without anybody seeming to belong to him. We were his friends, so we went. We had black sashes tied over our holland overalls, and black hats ; and the boys had black bands round their arms.

A great many of the village people came too. It was quite a big funeral, though poor little Tim had had so few friends in his lifetime. But he had died through being brave, and trying to be useful ;

and he really had saved Cocky's life, everybody said that. So the people were sorry for him. I think some of them were sorry they had not been kinder to Tim when he was alive, and they came to see him buried, and they brought flowers to put on his grave.

It was a very sunny afternoon, and everything looked lovely. I had never been to a funeral before ; but I liked Tim's because it did not seem sad really. They carried him in his little coffin covered with flowers, from the forge to the church-yard, and I thought when the clergyman came and met us and said those beautiful words, "I am the Resurrection and the Life," that it somehow seemed to take the sorrow out of everything. Little Tim would rise again, and have another life to live ; and now he was resting with Jesus in Paradise. I didn't want to cry after that, though lots of the women were crying. Dimples didn't cry either ; but stood all the time holding my hand and looking up into the sunny sky.

"I fought perhaps Tim might be looking down to see what we were doing," she explained to me afterwards, "but I couldn't just see him. Though I quite had a sort of feeling that he was there."

I had the same sort of feeling too, that it was

not really Tim who was let down into the earth ; but that Tim was somewhere quite different.

Cubbie had tied a black ribbon round Neddy's neck, and had led him up beforehand rather near the churchyard, and had tied him to a tree that he might see what went on.

"Because you see, donkeys are clever," he explained to me afterwards. "Tim said it was all wrong to think they were stupid. They understand things faster than horses ; and I thought perhaps he'd understand and be pleased to see how people came to Tim's funeral, and cried. I was only afraid perhaps that he might bray and make a noise ; but he didn't. He was quite good——"

"And if little Tim *was* looking down at us," added Dimples eagerly, "I'm sure he'd have been very pleased to fink that Neddy was at his funeral."

Next day we all went to the garden, and we had told Cocky that we should be there, and had said he had better come if he liked, even though he could not work ; because poor Cocky was very miserable just now, and the other boys on the green had gone back to school ; but the doctor would not let him go yet, because he had had a

bump on his head and it made his eyes ache and smart to use them.

When we got to the garden we stood quite still and said "O!" For really we were quite surprised! You know how it is sometimes when you think you know just how a place looks, and then you stop away for a little, and when you come back, somehow it looks—different, and yet you can't quite tell why.

"O Gordon—Roger!" we cried, "what have you been doing to it?"

"Why, can't you see? Cutting in the yew hedges properly, not just snagging and snipping as we did at first. Gearge came and showed us how. We had two pairs of steps and a board between them, so that we could get up quite high; and we had proper shears to do it with, and Gearge sharpened them when they got blunt. It was hard work, but rather jolly when you got into the trick of it. Doesn't it look—scrumptious?"

It did indeed. The yews were clipped now like two green walls one on either side. And our plants seemed to have grown, and I saw that some standard roses had been put in at the corners of the rose-beds, and that some bigger rose bushes had been planted amongst our smaller ones.

"O yes, Miles had us down when he was doing things in the Squire's rose garden, and he gave us a lot of things. And look how the ferns have picked up and grown. Don't they look happy? I think everything's looking just fine. I really think we've about done now, and that the Squire might come and see. Miles said so himself last time he was here. He looked quite pleased. Just fancy if we get that thirty pounds to send Papa away!"

We took hands and fairly danced for glee, our sorrow for poor little Tim lost sight of for the moment in our happiness at thinking of what was in store—  
for Papa.

Cocky came up presently, just as we were putting a few finishing touches, where the edgings wanted a little improvement, or weeds began to show.

"My eyes!" he exclaimed as he looked about him; and we took that for a mark of the deepest approbation, as indeed it was.

We went all round our domain; making sure that everything was as it should be.

"I wish the little chap could have seen it finished up like," said Cocky, heaving a big sigh.

"I expect he's got a little squint-hole of his own in the floor of Paradise," suddenly announced

Dimples, after a little moment for thought, "and can look down and see fings from there. I'm almost sure he has ; I seem to feel it somehow ! "

We were all silent for a short time after that, and then Roger said—

" Suppose we go down and tell the Squire we've finished and ask him when he'll come and see."

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE REWARD

IT was quite a little procession. The Squire's was perhaps the most important figure; but there was Aunt Isabel, to whom he gave his arm in a gallant fashion, whilst Aunt Susanna followed riding in state in the donkey chair, which Neddy drew with an air of proud comprehension.

Cubbie had begged hard that Aunt Susanna would use the chair. He was sure that Neddy would be so pleased.

"And Neddy ought to be there, you see," he farther explained, "because Neddy helped so splendidly. When you get there we can explain just what he did. And he would so love to come and hear what the Squire says. We could get the chair quite near to the garden, the way they bring the coke to stoke the Squire's furnaces, the one we flooded that day. Do let me bring you that way, Aunt Susanna!"

So Cubbie had pleaded, Dimples joining in the

petition ; and really it was quite a good plan ; for Aunt Susanna could not walk up hill very far ; and there was a good bit of hill to get up to our garden, and Neddy took her beautifully nearly all the way. And I'm sure he was very pleased at being used again. His ears went so nicely forward, and now and then he made a little whimpering noise through his soft nose, and Tim had told Dimples that he always did that when he was pleased about anything.

First we called for the Squire, who was ready and waiting for us. He made a great sweeping bow to our aunts, and when he had heard about Neddy and the chair, he said—

“Capital ! Capital” ! in that great big voice of his ; and he gave Aunt Isabel his arm, as I have said, and Cubbie and Dimples went back to their respective places, one on each side of Neddy, and the boys marched on in front, and I came behind.

Neddy was all decked out in flowers. Dimples said he really *must* be decorated, “’cause it was a triumphal procession,” and it really looked rather like it. We had let Cocky know about it, and as we got near the garden I saw him slinking about in rather a shame-faced way behind bushes ; and I went up and said to him—

" You can walk with me, Cocky ; for you helped, you know, and we are going to tell the Squire just how much everybody did. We didn't do it all. We couldn't have—and you helped a great lot."

As we neared the range of glass behind the wall we were skirting, we saw that Miles himself was standing in the doorway by which entrance was made to the Squire's outer walled garden ; and just behind him stood big Gearge grinning from ear to ear.

We had to stop here for Aunt Susanna to get out ; for the donkey chair could not go any farther, and the Squire said in his big bluff voice—

" Well, Miles, so you've come to see what kind of a mess these young folks have been making of the bit of wrecked garden up yonder, eh ? "

" Well, sir, I've been to and fro a bit already ; but I'd like to see what you think of it yourself, when you see it all."

" Come on, then, come on," spoke the Squire jovially, whereupon Dimples ran up crying out eagerly—

" O, and please let Gearge come, too ! Please let us have Gearge. He's been so very kind ; he's helped us a lot ; and when he worked I helped him, didn't I, Gearge ? He said I was so strong, didn't you, Gearge ? "

"As strong a'most as Samson!" answered Gearge with a red face and a wide grin, and the Squire laughed as he said—

"Then come along the whole pack of you—"

"And Neddy too, Neddy too!" cried Cubbie, whose fingers had been deftly unfastening the breeching and the traces. "Neddy did lots and lots. He carried everything we couldn't carry ourselves. Please let me bring him!"

The Squire nodded, and the procession was finally brought up by Neddy and Cocky, Cocky having earnestly begged to have the leading of Neddy.

Cubbie had given way, eager to run on in front with Dimples. You see you could not see much of the garden till you got right into it, because of the belt of fir trees just outside it, which had grown up since the cloud-burst flung down the yews which had once bounded it at the bottom.

We were glad of this, because we wanted them to be surprised when they came and saw it. So we guided them to the gap at the bottom of the garden, just between the basin at the end of the rockery and the yew hedge which had now been so neatly trimmed.

The Squire marched rather slowly towards the place, for now he had Aunt Susanna on his other

arm. The boys and Dimples were on ahead ; the gardener and Gearge lagged a little way behind. I felt my heart beating like a hammer inside of me.\* I thought the Squire would be pleased ; but one could never quite tell what a big man might think. We always saw our garden as it would look filled with flowers, like the pictures in Aunt Isabel's book ; but how would it look to the Squire ? That was quite a different matter !

“ Bless my soul ! ”

That was the first thing he said as he stood in the little gap and looked round about him.

He had never been to see it all the time we were at work. We used to wonder at first if he would ever come, but he never did whilst we were there, and yesterday he had told us in so many words that he had not been in our absence either. Now he stood looking up and looking down and looking all round about him ; and again he exclaimed—

“ Bless my soul ! ”

I thought he meant that he was pleased and surprised and I was very glad and pleased myself.

It was such a pretty autumnal morning too, just the right sort of morning to see a garden. As it faced south the sun shone on it. The sundial seemed quite to glisten, and the smooth circle

of turf round it had shining drops all over like a fairy's veil. Then there were the rose trees, and some of them had roses on them still, quite pretty ones ; and the little bushes and slips which were too small to bloom yet, were hanging with drops of dew like diamonds.

The water came leaping and gurgling and dancing down the little gully, and the cascade looked lovely with the sun on it, sometimes making rainbow colours on the dancing water. Then the big herbaceous border on the other side looked quite gay ; for there were sunflowers and "hot pokers" and some big dahlias, which were quite a new flower in those days, flaunting gaily in the sunshine, and there was not a weed to be seen on any of the paths, but the gravel was nice and yellow, and glistening with little bits of quartz and spar ; and the stone edges looked quite grand, and kept everything neat and trim.

"And please come and see the gazebo ! " cried Dimples, running backwards up one of the little paths that led by the sun-dial to the top of the garden. "We've got a roof on, a sort of a kind of a roof. The rain does come in rather ; but that doesn't matter so very much, does it ? Because on wet days I don't fink people care to come and sit

much in gazebos. And there's one corner where it's always dry!"

So the Squire began his tour through the garden, asking quick sharp questions all the while.

"Who did that? Who thought of this? How did you manage the other?"

And we explained just how everything had been done and who had helped us, and how much they had helped, and everything.

"We did ask if it was fair!" spoke Cubbie earnestly at intervals. "You remember, we asked if we might!"

And the Squire nodded his head each time, and said—

"I know—I know—I remember perfectly!" And by-and-bye he turned to Miles and asked—

"Well, Miles, what do you think of this, for the work of a pack of little cockneys?"

And Miles touched his hat, and said—

"I call it about first-rate, sir, for any young ladies and gentlemen; and begging your parding sir, I don't call 'em cockneys. They've got the blood in 'em somewhere, and it's bound to come out. They made up their minds what ud look best from the start, and they stuck to it too. I reckon their forebears knew what gardens were

like. What's born in a man is bound to come out somehow!"

"O Miles!" cried Dimples running up in great excitement, "do show us where the four bears are kept!"

Then the Squire grew interested about the water. He climbed the hill with Roger to see just what had been done there, whilst Aunt Susanna sat down by the gazebo on a garden seat we had set up outside there, and Aunt Isabel walked all round the garden with me, and kept saying—

"My dear, how pretty! How hard you must have worked. I am so pleased about it! The Squire will be pleased too. He knows what gardening is, and he is a great man for industry and perseverance. O my love! I am so very glad that you have done so well!"

"You think he is really pleased?"

"I am sure he is; and so is Aunt Susanna. She was rather afraid we should find a sad mess here, though I felt sure you had not left it very untidy; but I did not expect it to look like this."

"We couldn't have done it without Gearge; nor even without Cocky and Tim and Neddy. We had a lot of help——"

"Yes, dear, you could scarcely have done it

without, at your age ; but I can see how hard you have worked. I am very pleased about it, and I am sure your dear parents will be pleased too —to say nothing of the thirty pounds."

"O Aunt Isabel, do you think we shall really get it ? Do you think we have earned it ? "

"I think you have kept your share of the pact ; which is all the Squire will ask of you. You may be quite sure that if he thinks this, he will keep his own ! "

At that moment Neddy came wandering up the path towards us, and began to emit a long and doleful bray.

"I'm thinking as 'ow he looked to find Tim hereabouts," said Cocky, passing his hand across his eyes. "He's abin looking round about everywhere, and seems quite in a way. There was no keepin' him back, he just would come along up here. He's got the sense of a Christian, that he have ! "

We caressed Neddy, and tried to make him happy ; but I'm sure he was expecting Tim to come every minute, and he made sorrowful noises when he didn't —poor faithful Neddy !

I heard the boys' voices quite plainly coming down the hill with the Squire,—

"But I want to tell you, sir, that I went off for

nearly a whole fortnight. I didn't think I was ever going to come back. I was tired of it. I wanted to play cricket. And I think I wanted the rest to give up too ! ”

“ No, he didn't.” This was Roger who spoke. “ That was just my fault ; for whenever he wanted to make it up, I was beastly to him, and put him off again. I rather liked being the boss here and deciding just what to do. I kept him off—truly I did. If he didn't know it, I did——”

“ Well ?—and then——? ”

“ O well, it was Polly who showed me what a beast I was being. I was cross about it, then ; but afterwards I saw she was right ; and so—well—I played cricket, and Gordon came back to the garden, and it's been all right since ! ”

They were coming back now through the top entrance by the herb bed. Dimples ran forward to draw attention to her “ yarbs,” and when the Squire had sufficiently admired them, he turned and put his hand on my shoulder—

“ So this is the little peacemaker, is it ? ”

And that made me feel horribly ashamed ; for I knew it wasn't true, and I cried out— .

“ O no, for I was the first one of all to quarrel and be cross, and stop working and go away to sulk ! ”

"Dear me!" spoke the Squire. "Now we are getting behind the scenes. And when you got cross, my dear, what brought you round again?"

I was twisting my hands together and feeling as red as a turkey-cock. But Mamma had always taught us that when people older than ourselves asked us a question, we were to try and answer it.

"I think it was—the sun-dial!"

They all turned to look; and there were the letters cut into the rim seeming to stare right in our faces—

#### FUGIT HORA—ORA.

The Squire put his hand again upon my shoulder; but he did not say anything more about it, and I was very glad. Instead of this he turned to Cocky, and after fumbling a moment in his pocket he brought out a big bright crown piece, and held it out to him.

"I hear, my lad, that you made yourself very useful here, and worked well, and had many brilliant ideas. There's something for you—not payment, you understand, for it has been a labour of love all through; but just as a reward for industry and perseverance, two of the finest qualities in a man's nature—without which he will never get on in life, whatever his walk there may be."

Then the Squire walked all about the garden, as Aunt Isabel had done, and asked yet more questions, after which he said—

“ Then come along with me, my young friends. I’ve seen what you have managed to accomplish with two months’ work ; now we’ll think what is the next thing to be done ! ”

As we trooped back towards the house, Gearge whispered to Gordon as we passed him by—

“ Squire’s just terrible pleased. Oi can see that much by the look of un ! I be main glad, that I be ! Only us’ll miss you from the place, that us will ! ”

• I was sure we should miss our garden work too ; but we could not pause to think of that then. We were on our way to the Squire’s house, to hear what he had to say to us about our reward. It seemed to me that really we had had our reward in the pleasure we had had out of the garden, and in the praise we had received for our work ; but there was that sea-voyage for Papa, still so much recommended for him, and still the same difficulty about finding the needful thirty pounds !

There was a cold luncheon spread for us in the Squire’s dining-room when we got back to the house ; and we were first taken there to eat and drink ; but when that was over and done with,

he took us into a wonderful room, all lined with books, and the aunts sat down in great deep leather chairs, but we stood in a row before the Squire's table, and he made us a little speech.

I can't remember just all he said, because I was very excited ; but he said he was very pleased with what we had done, pleased to have a nice garden again, where for so long all had been rubbishy sort of rough ground ; but more pleased because we had overcome difficulties, and thrown ourselves into the task he had set us, and had not been daunted by hard work, and had persevered and shown that though none of us were so very big or so very strong, yet that we had all together worked successfully and well.

" And I know that it was primarily for the sake of your parents that you did this, my dears ; and I am very glad to be able to tell you that you have honestly earned the reward which I promised. I am exceedingly glad of this, because I wished you to have it ; but I wished yet more that it should be the legitimate outcome of real work, which now it is," and as he spoke the Squire drew his cheque-book out of the drawer before him, and began to write.

Dimples would have liked a pile of bright gold

sovereigns ; but I knew that it was much more convenient to have a cheque that would go in a letter by post. It was to me that the Squire handed the little slip of paper, with a very kind smile on his face ; and as his writing was very big and black, I could not help reading it at a glance ; and that made me cry out—

“ O, but you’ve made a mistake ! You’ve written sixty instead of thirty ! ”

Then the Squire beamed at us over the spectacles he had put on to write with, but which he now pulled off.

“ It is not a mistake, my dears. That is what I want you to explain to your mother when you write, if you can write letters to her yourselves yet. When your mother was a little girl I used to know her, and carry her about on my back, and play games with her. She used to call me ‘ Mr. Lion, Mr. Lion,’ and would come running to meet me whenever she saw me. She was one of the few little girls in the world who were not afraid of me.”

“ I’m not afraid ! ” suddenly said Dimples.  
“ At least—I don’t—fink—I am.”

Then we all laughed, and the Squire said—

“ You are her daughter, my dear ; courage is

said to be an inherited quality. Well, as I was saying, your mother and I were great friends in those days ; and I want you to give her an old man's love, and tell her that if her husband goes for this little sea trip, her old friend would like to think that she went too. No doubt she needs the bracing up and the warm sunshine of the south and the rest and the change almost as much as the invalid himself. And we should all like to think that husband and wife could enjoy this little pleasure cruise together ! ”

“ O !—O—Oh ! ”

“ Tell her that you by your own industry earned enough to send your father away to get health ; and that her old-time friend wishes for the pleasure of sending her with him. I hear she is a good sailor, and that she would greatly enjoy it ; and as for the kind ladies here, they are more than willing to continue the charge of certain troublesome young creatures during the time that the parents will be away ! ”

“ O huroosh—huroosh ! ” cried Gordon in an access of delight. “ Do you really mean that we are to stay here, and that Papa and Mamma can both go the voyage ? ”

“ You ask your aunts about that ; but so I

understand. Yes, my dear, what is it you want to ask ? ”

For Dimples had come up to him and laid both her little hands upon his knee.

“ Please, if we stop here, may we go on doing things in the garden, we do love it so ! ”

“ Certainly, my dear. I shall be very glad to have you go on caring for it. Weeds will be certain to appear, even in winter weather, if the season keeps open, and new paths are apt to want mending and remaking after heavy rains. I shall be very glad for you to undertake the care of it, if your lessons do not interfere ; but you will probably begin with them again after this long holiday ! ”

Dimples looked rather sober ; she had almost forgotten that there were such things as lessons.

Aunt Isabel now gently intervened.

“ Yes, the boys must begin to think of study again, but Dr. Armytage has very kindly offered to let them come to the Rectory three mornings a week to read Latin and Greek with him. On the other days we will all read history together and my sister will teach them mathematics and arithmetic. But as they have been used to so much fresh air, we shall not keep them too close to their

books. They will have plenty of time to see to the care of the garden, if you approve, Squire——”

“I do approve, ma’am ; I always approve of young folks making use of all their faculties, and of showing the stuff that is in them. That boy there”—and he indicated Roger by a motion of his thumb—“has the making of an engineer in him. Let him come up as often as he can when we are threshing to learn what he can of the mechanism of an engine——”

“O ! ” breathed Roger ; and I don’t know which of us went home happiest that afternoon.

The letter enclosing the cheque was written for that day’s post, our Great Undertaking had been completed, and our reward was something scarcely to be believed !

## CHAPTER XX

### CHRISTMAS

THE hall was all decorated with greenery. Glistening leaves and shining berries adorned the walls and drooped over every picture. In the long panelled parlour and the low-ceiled dining-room it was just the same. Christmas cheer seemed to be in the very air, and we were all so busy and so happy that at intervals even our busy tongues ceased to wag, so intent were we upon the task in hand.

For Christmas was coming ! And besides that Papa and Mamma were coming too ! They might arrive at any time, that was the exciting part of it. The ship might be in port already ; and they would take the first train they could catch ; but we should not know anything till they drove up to the door.

For in those days, though there were tele-

graph wires between big towns, there were few in country places ; and people were half frightened to get a telegraphic message, which seemed to have something uncanny about it.

But, on the other hand, we took things like this as a matter of course, and did not think it inconvenient not to know beforehand. Indeed, we children felt that there was something invigorating and inspiring about the suspense. All yesterday we had worked like Trojans to get the house ready, just in case the ship should come in before its time ; and now that we might really expect her in, we redoubled our efforts.

Over the door we had put up a great "WELCOME" in holly berries on a ground of white cotton-wool edged with a deep border of box. Aunt Isabel had helped us over that, and mightily proud we were of the achievement.

We had spent our pocket money on Chinese lanterns to illuminate the drive, in case they arrived after dark, and in some fire-works to be let off last thing before bed-time in their honour.

Dimples could not help running off to the door every five minutes to look if anything was coming up the drive ; and every noise we heard from without made us stop working to listen, just in case it was

the carriage from the station inn bringing them here to us.

"I've growed a whole inch! Won't Papa think me big!" Dimples kept crying. "He used to say he'd have to put salt on my head to stop me, like the weeds on the garden; but he never did, and so I've gone on growing. I want to be as big as he is 'fore I've done!"

"Bosh!" cried Gordon. "Papa is more than six feet high. If you grew to that, they'll put you in a circus show and call you the Giantess!"

Whereupon Dimples looked sober, not quite certain how she would relish such an honour.

The early dusk of December was falling over us. But really and truly our work was done.

"Let's light the lanterns!" cried Cubbie. "For we must have it nice for them to come! Roger, you said you could 'luminate our 'WELCOME' if they came after dark!"

"So I can!" cried Roger, and rushed away into the back regions, whilst the rest of us went out to our lanterns hanging in the trees, and carefully lighted the candles. As the night was very still, this was not difficult, and soon we had a delightfully fairy-like drive. Dimples danced like a fairy herself, clapping her hands and exclaiming with

delight, and just within the hall door Roger had set up two lamps upon brackets, so that the light fell full upon our big "WELCOME," and it seemed to shine more brightly now than it had done by day.

"They're coming, they're coming, I hear them!" Cubbie, who had been as far as the gate, now came tearing back flushed and breathless with excitement. "I know it's them! I can see two great eyes of the lamps. They're coming!—they're coming!—they're almost here!"

It was true this time, it was no false alarm. I had just time to run with the news to the panelled parlour; the aunts had just time to get out into the hall to join the welcoming crowd, before the fly drove leisurely up at the door, and before it had well stopped, a very tall, but active figure had leaped out, and Dimples and I were in Papa's arms.

And such a Papa! Thin to be sure, we had never remembered him otherwise; but brown and strong and full of life.

"My little beavers! My little beavers!" he kept saying over and over again, as he kissed us, and cuddled up Dimples as though he could not bear to let her out of his arms; but there was Mamma, too, who, when she had hugged the boys, must have

her darling in her arms to love and kiss. She hugged Dimples and I hugged her ; and we all talked at once, and all laughed, and some of us cried—I'm sure I don't know why, only if you are just awfully happy you do cry sometimes, and we none of us could hear anything the others said ; but it didn't seem to matter in the least. Nothing mattered now that Papa and Mamma were back, and he was quite, quite well again.

" Yes, really and truly I am," he said ; this was after the hubbub had subsided, and the travellers were in the panelled parlours, and we were all clustered round them, listening to everything they said, but not talking ourselves now, at least only when they looked at us and smiled, and asked a question. " The sea always suited me, and directly we were afloat the life seemed to flow back into me. That's what the doctors had said when they prescribed the voyage ; only we could not see our way to it. It was these little beavers of ours who managed that wonderful life-giving cruise ! "

Dimples had slipped up to Papa, and was already perched upon his knee.

" What are beavers, Papa ? And why do you call us beavers ? "

" Beavers are little creatures that dig and delve

and make wonderful places by their own industry and skill ! I don't exactly know what these five beavers have accomplished ; but I know what they did for me ! ”

“ We'll show you to-morrow, Daddy !—we'll show you just everything. You shall see our garden, and the hatch and the Squire, and everything—”

“ Yes, I must certainly see the Squire. For without him not even my beavers could have accomplished such magical results ! Tell me, boys, did you not get a bit tired of all the work, and rather want to chuck it ? ”

Gordon's face went very red.

“ Roger didn't ; but I did. I did chuck it once, I told the Squire so ! ”

“ Shut up ! ” said Roger ; “ it wasn't that really. It was only because I was a bit of a beast to you—”

“ My dears,” spoke Aunt Susanna gently, “ your father understands very well, I am sure, how you were sometimes tempted to give up ; and how you persevered. You shall take him to see your work to-morrow. To-night we are all too glad and thankful to have him back so strong and well, to have room for any other thoughts.”

We took this as our dismissal, and ran away

upstairs to dance a sort of horn-pipe of our own, and indulge in other triumphant antics.

But we were not yet at the end of the day's joys, this most happy and delightful of Christmas Eves ; for after their late dinner, Papa and Mamma both came up to our play-room, and they had brought with them little presents for each one of us, Christmas gifts, curious things from the places where they had stayed. Gordon had such a knife !—it looked as though people must have been killed by it ; Roger had a curious lamp, which pleased him very much. Dimples and I had pretty things in embroidery and coral and feathers. We were all enchanted with our treasures. But that was not the best of it either.

"We have something else to tell you, children," said Mamma presently. "Something that I hope will please you, though perhaps you may be a little sorry too. Will you mind very much not going back to live in London any more ?"

"O no, Mamma !" I cried. "We like the country so much better !"

"Well, this is not quite country either ; though the country is not far away. It is like this, dears. On board the boat with us was a gentleman, who has a great deal of property of different sorts. He

has land, and he has mills, and he has what people call a great many 'irons in the fire.' He talked a great deal to Papa, and it ended in his asking him to look after some undertaking of his in the midlands. There is a big mill where they make cloth, and there is some land all round which is likely to be built on ; and there are a great many interests at stake ; and it needs somebody there to look after all this, somebody trained to business habits, and who is perfectly honourable and just."

"Like Papa," said Dimples eagerly.

"Well, that is how this gentleman felt. It came out that we had several friends in common; and he had heard a good deal about us one way or the other. So he asked Papa to take this post ; and he has accepted. And we shall have a nice, old-fashioned house to live in just outside the town, with a big garden behind walls and a little orchard and paddock close by running down to the river——"

"O Mamma !—then we can take Neddy ! "

"Neddy—my pet ?—do you mean the donkey you told us about in your letters ? "

"•O yes, Mamma, dear, good Neddy ! He loves us, and we love him ; but we didn't fink we could have him in London, so Aunt Susanna said he might

live in the orchard. But we are so afraid Tinker Tim will steal him some day. Aunt Susanna did explain to him that he was ours ; and gave him a little money too. But people say, he is always saying he'll have him back yet. He's such a bad wicked man. We shall be much happier if Neddy comes away with us to the nice place where Tinker Tim can't find him any more ! ”

“ Well, darling, perhaps we can manage that for you. You must ask Papa what he says.”

I couldn't get to sleep that night for thinking of all these things. It was so lovely to have Papa and Mamma back, and that he was quite well and strong. And it was so queer to think 'of that new home we were going to. We were all very pleased about it ; for we did not like the thought of living amongst streets and houses again, and Roger was so excited to think of being near a mill, and being able to go and see it almost whenever he liked, that he could talk of nothing else. Gordon thought it splendid to have a river past our garden, where he could fish, and where he could boat. Mamma said that though we should not be rich, we should be quite comfortably off, and that perhaps the boys would be able to have a boat.

So there was a great, great deal to think about

as I lay in bed ; and it must have been very late indeed, for suddenly the church bells began to ring, and so I knew that it was twelve o'clock, and that another day had come—Christmas Day !

Then the door opened very softly, I could see it in the moonlight, and Mamma came tip-toeing in.

" O Mamma, is that you ? A Merry Christmas ! A Merry Christmas ! It is Christinas, isn't it ? "

" Yes, darling, Papa and I have been sitting up talking to the kind aunts, and Christmas Day has taken us almost unawares. But what is my little girl doing awake at such an hour ? "

" O, I don't know, Mamma, only I couldn't go to sleep. Everything seems so nice, as though we shouldn't have any more troubles any more ! Do you know what I mean ? "

" Yes, my love, I know very well. God has been very very good to us ; for the sky looked dark about us for a good while ; but we put our faith and confidence in Him, and see what He has done for us. It does not mean that we shall not have troubles to bear as we go through life. Perhaps that would be scarcely good for us ; but it gives us great courage and great love and trust ; for it teaches us how God is always watching and

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guarding us, and that He never forgets us, and that in His own good time He shows us a way out into the sunshine ! ”

I pulled Mamma’s arm round me tight.

“ Oh, yes, indeed I do begin to understand, Mamma dear ; it was our garden that helped me to a great deal ! ”

“ Yes, dear. Everything helps us, if we go about with open eyes and loving hearts. And what did the garden do so particularly ? ”

“ You see, Aunt Isabel said we might pray about it. We always said ‘ Prosper Thou our handiwork.’ And God did prosper it, didn’t he ? ”

“ Indeed He did, my darling. His answer has been wonderful ; and think what has come about through it ! ”

Then I understood that but for the sea-voyage, Papa would not have met the gentleman who had given him this nice house, and found him work which he liked better than the post he had lost through illness. And perhaps—perhaps—if we hadn’t gone to the Squire to ask for work, then the sea trip might not have been made. It was all rather bewildering, the thought of what a chain of circumstances had led up to this. I shut my eyes and cuddled up close in mother’s arms.

"There was the sun-dial too," I whispered presently.

"Yes, darling, the sun-dial? What of it?"

"It has a motto—the Squire told me what it meant. You'll know, Mamma: *Fugit Hora—Ora*."

Mother's arms closed fast round me.

"Have you learnt the meaning of those words, my darling?"

"I think so, indeed I do, dear Mamma."

She kissed me, and whispered with a little catch in her voice—

"Then, dear child, the garden has taught you the lesson of all others which I would have had my little daughter learn, if it has taught her how to pray."

THE END



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In writing about Australia Miss Whitfeld is, in a very literal sense, at home. In "Tom who was Rachel" the author has described a large family of children living on an up-country station; and the story presents a faithful picture of the everyday life of the bush. Rachel (otherwise Miss Thompson, abbreviated to "Miss Tom," afterwards to "Tom") is the children's step-sister; and it is her influence for good over the wilder elements in their nature that provides the real motive of a story for which all English boys and girls will feel grateful.

## J. M. WHITFELD

**The Colters :** An Australian Story for Girls. Illustrated in Colour by GEORGE SOPER. Large crown 8vo, cloth, olivine edges. 5/-

This book deals with a merry family of Australian boys and girls. There is Hector, the eldest, manly and straightforward, and Matt, the plain-spoken, his younger brother. Ruby, quiet and gentle, with an aptitude for versifying, is well contrasted with her headstrong, impulsive cousin Effie. The author draws a charming picture of a family, united in heart, while differing very much in habit and temperament.

## ELSIE J. OXENHAM

**Mistress Nanciebel :** Illustrated in Colour by JAMES DURDEN. Crown 8vo, cloth, olivine edges. 5/-

This is a story of the Restoration. Nanciebel's father, Sir John Seymour, had so incurred the displeasure of King Charles by his persistent opposition to the threatened war against the Dutch, that he was sent out of the country. Nothing would dissuade Nanciebel from accompanying him, so they sailed away together and were duly landed on a desolate shore, which they afterwards discovered to be a part of Wales. Here, with the help of Nanciebel, John o' Peace made a new home for his family.

## WINIFRED M. LETTS

**Bridget of All Work :** Illustrated by JAMES DURDEN.

The scene of the greater part of this story is laid in Lancashire, and the author has chosen her heroine from among those who know what it is to feel the pinch of want and strive loyally to combat it. There is a charm about Bridget Joy, moving about her kitchen, keeping a light heart in the most depressing surroundings. Girl though she is, it is her arm that encircles and protects those who should in other circumstances have been her guardians, and her brave heart that enables the word "Home" to retain its sweetness for those who are dependent on her.

## MRS. HERBERT STRANG

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**Sylvia's** Illustrated in Colour by JAMES DURDEN. Crown  
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**Bitha's Wonderful** Illustrated by GRACE LODGE.

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Miss Katharine Tynan brings her very sure touch and charm to bear on the story of an Irish girl who comes to London to earn her living. Bitha O'Grady has no equipment as a teacher or secretary, but she can "do things with her hands and make flowers look nice." She sets to work to make a name for herself as a decorator of ballrooms and supper-rooms, and in the course of the story has many adventures. Her father, the old Colonel, is obliged to leave her alone in London, but at the end of the book the broken fortunes of the family are repaired, and Bitha and her father go back to Castle O'Grady, their old home.

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**The Girl** Illustrated by N. TENISON.

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"The modern spirit is admirably shown in this excellent story."—*Lady's Pictorial.*





